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SIR CHARLES WARREN
AND
SPION KOP



Yours from
Charles Warner

From a photograph by A. Bassano

SIR CHARLES WARREN

AND

SPION KOP

A VINDICATION

BY

‘ DEFENDER ’

WITH A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH, PORTRAIT

AND MAP

LONDON

SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 WATERLOO PLACE

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PREFACE

IT is now more than two years since the operation took place on the Tugela River in Natal, that ended in the capture and the unwarrantable abandonment the same day of the position of Spion Kop. The lapse of time since these events occurred naturally caused a loss of interest in this chapter of the history of the war in South Africa; but the recent publication of portions of the despatches omitted in the 'Gazette' of 1900, and also of other documents received at the time by the War Office but not disclosed, has again brought the subject into prominence, revived public interest in it, and offered an opportunity which we gladly seize to vindicate the conduct of an officer who has been condemned without being heard.

Whether Sir Charles Warren will be allowed any opportunity of defending himself against

the strictures passed upon him by Sir Redvers Buller, either now or when the war is over, is doubtful; but at length, having before us all the documents received at the War Office, it is proposed to show in the following pages that, in spite of the difficult circumstances in which he found himself, Sir Charles Warren did his duty, and that, had Spion Kop not been recklessly abandoned by a subordinate, there is every reason to suppose that he would have gained a great success.

The publication of the despatches on Spion Kop in the parliamentary Easter recess of 1900 took the world by surprise—so much so, indeed, that a story was current that it was due to the mistake of a War Office clerk. It did not commend itself as either a useful or a desirable proceeding to publish to the whole world the strictures passed by the General in command in Natal upon his second-in-command, and those of the Commander-in-Chief in South Africa upon both, especially as those officers were still serving their country in the field.

The political mistake made by the Government was speedily demonstrated by the debates

that took place on the reassembling of Parliament; but it now appears that a greater want of judgment was shown than was then supposed, and that having decided, however wrongly, to publish the despatches the Government would have done better to have published them in full. And this for several reasons—it would have made little difference to those censured, would have enabled the public to understand the Spion Kop operations, which could not be understood from the incomplete documents, and would have prevented a distinguished officer lying for two years under the shadow of unjust accusations.

Much capital was made by the Opposition in Parliament out of the suggestion of the Secretary of State for War that Sir Redvers Buller should rewrite his despatch, or rather should write a separate despatch for publication; but any one who has tried to get to the bottom of the business from the material available must have felt that Lord Lansdowne was perfectly right in suggesting that what was wanted was a simple statement from Sir Redvers Buller of what he intended to do, and how it was done or not done. Instead of this there were despatches giving formal cover

to other despatches from Sir Charles Warren, and then criticising that officer's actions unfavourably. No statement was to be found anywhere indicating what Sir Redvers Buller had intended to do, and as the instructions he issued were not published, the operation which Sir Charles Warren was directed to execute could only be gathered from the references he made to them in his reports. These reports were evidently written to his chief in the belief that the General commanding would write a full account of what he had proposed to do, and how far his orders had been successfully carried out, or otherwise.

To most men, conscientiously compelled to censure in an official despatch those employed under them, the suggestion from the War Office that such censure should be confined to a confidential communication, and that some account of the operation and the cause of failure should be written for publication, would have come as a welcome relief; and had Sir Redvers Buller seen his way to comply with it and at the same time to send copies to Sir Charles Warren of the confidential despatches, he would have placed himself

in an unassailable position, he would have given Sir Charles Warren an opportunity of confidentially justifying himself, if he could do so, to the Secretary of State for War and the Commander-in-Chief, he would have enabled his countrymen to know more about the operations than was otherwise possible, and the world would have been spared a very painful exhibition.

To this course, however, Sir Redvers Buller would not consent. He prided himself on his integrity in resisting such a proposal, and has been much praised for refusing to write a despatch for publication, having already written one, which was mainly an indictment of his second-in-command, on whom he threw the responsibility for the failure of the operations.

It is the custom of the Service—and a very fair and proper custom it is—that an unfavourable confidential report made upon a junior officer by his superior shall be communicated to him before it is sent forward, so that he may have an opportunity either of excusing himself or of amending his conduct, and may have no reason to complain that advantage has been taken of a confidential communication to make un-

favourable reports behind his back, of which he remains in ignorance.

Sir Redvers Buller does not appear to have been mindful of this custom, when, instead of writing a simple account of what he proposed to do, and how it failed of accomplishment, he used the opportunity to criticise most unfavourably the conduct of the distinguished officer, his second-in-command, still serving under him in face of the enemy, and left him in complete ignorance of the accusations made against him. This ignorance he knew must last in any case until the despatches were published, and, if they were not published, would never be removed. But Sir Redvers Buller went beyond this, for he attached to his despatch a separate memorandum, 'not necessarily for publication,' in which he reiterated his complaints of the conduct of Sir Charles Warren and accused him of such incapacity as unfitted him for independent command. But not a word of this reached Sir Charles Warren, whose exertions in the field during the succeeding month under Sir Redvers Buller contributed so greatly to the victory of Pieters and the relief of Ladysmith ; and it was not until

he saw the despatches in the newspapers, long after this campaign was over, that he knew of the secret stab his reputation had received at the hand of his commander. Two years later the recently published omissions have informed him how seriously the attack upon his reputation as a soldier was intended.

A correspondence between Mr. Henry Norman, M.P., and the Right Hon. A. J. Balfour, First Lord of the Treasury, published on 21st February last, contains some observations by the latter very much to the point on the want of any narrative of the Spion Kop operations in Sir Redvers Buller's despatches. Mr. Balfour points out, as was done two years before in the parliamentary debates, that the General in command, 'in accordance with the Queen's Regulations, with the best precedents, and with public convenience,' should have furnished a simple narrative, unencumbered by controversy, of the operations which took place. To this Sir Redvers Buller objected, in a letter published on the 26th March last, that he was not in command, that he was not present, and that therefore it was not his duty to write such a narrative. The

reply of Mr. Balfour, from which an extract is appended, will be found to be fully borne out in the pages of this book.

Extract from a letter from Mr. A. J. Balfour to Sir Redvers Buller dated 10th March 1902.

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‘ You say that, not being in chief command, you were not the proper person to write an account of what took place. But can this be sustained? I find that on 15th January you ordered Sir Charles Warren to cross the Tugela to the west of Spion Kop; on the 21st and 22nd you gave him personal instructions as to the disposal of his artillery; on the latter day you agreed with him, after discussion, that Spion Kop would have to be taken; on the 23rd you definitely decided upon the attack; you selected the officer who was to lead it, detailing one of your Staff to accompany him; it was by your orders that on the 24th Lieut.-Colonel Thorneycroft assumed command on the summit of Spion Kop after General Woodgate was wounded, and all heliographic messages between the officers in the fighting line and Sir Charles Warren passed through your camp, and were seen by you before

they reached their destination. As you were thus in constant touch with the troops actually engaged on the top of the hill, so also you kept general control over the movements of the co-operative forces under General Lyttelton, with whom you were in communication during both the morning and the afternoon of the 24th. It is, of course, true that you were not present at the actual Spion Kop engagement. But if this was a reason for not writing an account of it, it was a reason equally applicable to Sir Charles Warren, whose headquarters, as I am informed, were very little nearer to the scene of action than were your own. It was on these grounds that I did not draw any distinction between your position during the days of Spion Kop and that of any other general conducting operations over an extended field, at every part of which he could not, from the nature of the case, be present. You were responsible for the general plan of action ; you intervened frequently in its execution ; you were not prevented either by distance or any other material obstacle from intervening more frequently still, had you deemed it expedient to do so. Was I wrong, then, in pointing

out that it would have been in accordance both with precedent and the Queen's Regulations for you to have supplied the Commander-in-Chief with a narrative of these important military events based on your own observations and on the reports of those of your officers who were immediately engaged with the enemy ?'

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We have never been able to understand why the orders given to Sir Charles Warren were not published with the despatches two years ago. True they were called secret instructions, but of course the secrecy was a temporary matter, and they ceased to be secret when the operations were over. Without them there was no way for the public to learn officially, except in the most general way, what the General in command in Natal desired to do, and probably, owing to the wording of Lord Roberts's despatch, a misconception arose, widely entertained in the army and highly prejudicial to Sir Charles Warren.

This misconception was that Sir Redvers Buller instructed Sir Charles Warren to make his turning movement by way of Acton Homes, instead of which Warren obstinately preferred the

route by Groote Hoek. It was supposed that by the first of these two routes the force might have marched a long way round, but would have got into Ladysmith with little difficulty, whereas the (hypothetical) substitution by Warren of the Groote Hoek road had necessitated the capture of Spion Kop. The publication of the instructions upsets this theory. The Acton Homes road is never mentioned. The only references to the direction of the turning movement are vague—‘to the West of Spion Kop’—‘acting as circumstances require’—‘refusing your right and throwing your left forward’—and it now appears that Sir Redvers Buller intended Warren to go by the Groote Hoek route.

In vain has the Government endeavoured to shield the military reputation of Sir Redvers Buller at the expense of others. He has been consistent in his efforts to get the despatches published in full, even to the memorandum ‘not necessarily for publication’—a severe condemnation of Sir Charles Warren’s incapacity, but a more damning one of his own—and by his attitude has compelled the Government to give way. How truly applicable is an epigram of

Mr. Henry Sidgwick, quoted by Sir Henry Howarth in a recent letter to the 'Morning Post': 'The darkest shadows in life are those which a man makes when he stands in his own light.'

In addition to the official documents on the subject of Spion Kop much information of a very varied character has accumulated during the last two years, and besides invaluable verbal observations and descriptions gathered from conversation with officers from the front who took part in the operations, there is a whole library of books by newspaper correspondents, officers, and others, which bear upon these operations and throw light upon much that is obscure in the official papers. Among many others may be mentioned 'My Diocese during the War,' by Bishop Baynes of Natal; 'The Relief of Ladysmith,' by Mr. J. B. Atkins; 'The Natal Campaign,' by Mr. Bennet Burleigh; 'London to Ladysmith via Pretoria,' by Mr. Winston Churchill, M.P.; 'The History of the War in South Africa,' by Dr. Conan Doyle; 'The Relief of Ladysmith,' by Captain Holmes Wilson; 'Buller's Campaign: With the Natal Field

Force of 1900,' by Lieutenant E. Blake Knox, Royal Army Medical Corps.

Magazine articles have also appeared from time to time, some commenting on the operations themselves, others filling up gaps in the narrative, and others again incidentally referring to facts in connection with the operations. Among these last may be mentioned: (1) A series of articles contributed by Sir Charles Warren himself to the 'National Review' entitled 'Some Lessons from the South African War'; (2) Mr. Oppenheim's defence of Lieut.-Colonel Thorneycroft in the 'Nineteenth Century'; (3) An instructive diary of Dr. Raymond Maxwell, who was serving with the Boers, in the 'Contemporary Review' for December 1901; and (4) 'The Diary of a Boer Officer,' by another of them, in the 'United Service Magazine' for February this year. Some reference should perhaps be made to one of a series of articles in 'Blackwood's Magazine' by 'Linesman,' which was headed 'Dies Iræ,' and dealt with Spion Kop, because these articles have attracted a good deal of attention, are cleverly written, and have since been republished in book form. They do

not, however, impress the military reader as very accurate descriptions, but rather as war pictures, in which the colour is laid on with no sparing hand to obtain the highest effect, the aim being to please the sensation-loving reader. The value of the account of Spion Kop given in 'Blackwood' is discounted by 'Linesman' himself, who, having told us that 'what the writer saw of the fight on the summit of Spion Kop was little enough'; that he had learnt 'to describe—nay, believe nothing that one has not seen with one's own eyes'; and that, 'if the tongue is an unruly member, much more so is the ear'; nevertheless proceeds to describe in blood-curdling language what he did not see with his own eyes, and must have heard with 'unruly' ears.

The general result of all the information is to make it clear that Spion Kop was the key of the position dominating the country, and that the holders of it opened the way to Ladysmith; that no one was more astonished at its unauthorised abandonment than Sir Charles Warren, except the Boers themselves, who refused to credit the evidence of their senses, and at first believed its forsaken condition to be a trap! No longer,

indeed, is it possible to regard the unwarrantable surrender of this position as a fortunate accident preventing an actual and impending disaster on the morrow, or, as Lieut.-Colonel Thorneycroft is reported to have said, ‘a mop up in the morning.’ Rather its abandonment was the blundering relinquishment of a hardly won and well assured success, only to be compared with the fatuous withdrawal in the morning of the storming parties which made the brilliant night attack and surprised the fortress of Bergen op Zoom on 8th March 1814.

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SIR CHARLES WARREN

AND

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

A SHORT sketch of the career of Sir Charles Warren is an appropriate introduction to his appearance in South Africa as the leader of the 5th Division of the army in the Natal campaign, and as the Commander of the Field Force in the operations on the Tugela between 15th and 25th January 1900.

PARENTAGE

Lieut.-General Sir Charles Warren, G.C.M.G., K.C.B., F.R.S., is the son of the late Major-General Sir Charles Warren, K.C.B., Colonel of the 96th Foot, by his first wife, Mary Anne,

daughter of William Hughes, Esq., of Dublin and Carlow, and grandson of the Very Rev. John Warren, Dean of Bangor, North Wales.

His father served under the Duke of Wellington in the march to Paris after the battle of Waterloo, in India, and in South Africa, and the notes and sketches he there made upon expeditions into the interior were made use of by his son fifty years later, when reporting on the Bechuana and Griqua territories in 1876. He saw active service during a second tour in India, in China, and in the Crimean war, and was several times wounded. He retired after holding the command of the Infantry Brigade at Malta for five years, and was created a Knight Commander of the Bath. He had a natural turn for science, mathematics, and adventure, which, together with his love of soldiering, was inherited by his son Charles.

EARLY SERVICE—GIBRALTAR AND CHATHAM

Lieut.-General Sir Charles Warren was born at Bangor, North Wales, on 7th February 1840. His early education took place at the Grammar Schools of Bridgnorth and Wem, and at

Cheltenham College. He then entered the Royal Military College at Sandhurst, and from that passed through the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich and received a commission as lieutenant in the Royal Engineers on 23rd December 1857. After the usual course of professional instruction at Chatham, Warren went to Gibraltar, where he spent seven years, and, in addition to the ordinary duties of an Engineer subaltern—looking after his men and constructing or improving fortifications and barrack buildings—he was employed on a trigonometrical survey of the Rock, which he completed on a large scale. He constructed two models of the famous fortress, one of which is now at the Rotunda at Woolwich, and the other at Gibraltar. He was also engaged for some months in rendering the eastern face of the Rock inaccessible by scarping or building up any places that might lend a foothold to an enemy. He was selected in 1865 to assist Professor Ramsay in a geological survey of Gibraltar, but it fell through. While at this station he invented a fitment to gun carriages to supersede the truck levers of the Service; an invention objected to at the time because it was

made of iron, but subsequently adopted into the Service.

In 1864 Lieut. Warren married Fanny Margaretta Haydon, a daughter of the late Samuel Haydon, Esq., of Guildford. On the completion of his term of service at Gibraltar he returned to England in 1865, was appointed Assistant Instructor in Surveying at the School of Military Engineering at Chatham, and a year later his services were lent by the War Office to the Palestine Exploration Fund.

JERUSALEM, 1867 TO 1870

The object of the Palestine Exploration Fund was the illustration of the Bible, and it originated mainly through the exertions of Sir George Grove, who formed an influential committee, of which for a long time Sir Walter Besant was secretary. Captain (afterwards Sir) Charles Wilson and Lieut. Anderson, R.E., had already been at work on the survey of Palestine, and, in 1867, it was decided to undertake excavations at Jerusalem to elucidate, if possible, many doubtful questions of Biblical archæology, such as the site of the Holy Sepulchre, the true direction of

the second wall and the course of the first, second, and third walls, involving the sites of the towers of Hippicus, Phasælus, Mariamne, and Psephinus, and many other points of great interest to the Biblical student.

The task was entrusted to Lieut. Warren, who was assisted by non-commissioned officers of Royal Engineers. The difficulties in the way of carrying it out were great—obstruction on the part of the Pashas, physical dangers, and want of money. As regards the first, only great tact and firmness prevented the complete suspension of the work. ‘Indeed,’ says Major-General Whitworth Porter in his ‘History of the Corps of Royal Engineers,’ ‘the Vizierial letter, under which the party was supposed to be acting, expressly forbade excavations at the Noble Sanctuary and the various Moslem and Christian shrines. How, in spite of this, Warren succeeded in his object is well told in his “Underground Jerusalem.” ’

With regard to physical danger Dean Stanley wrote: ‘In the plain and unadorned narrative of Captain Warren,¹ the difficulties and dangers

¹ Warren was promoted to be Captain on 20th October 1869.

of the undertaking might almost escape notice. Yet the perils will appear sufficiently great to any one who draws out from the good-humoured story the fact that these excavations were carried on at the constant risk of life and limb to the bold explorers. The whole series of their progress was a succession of "lucky escapes." Huge stones were day after day ready to fall, and sometimes did fall, on their heads. One of the explorers was "injured so severely that he could barely crawl out into the open air"; another extricated himself with difficulty, torn and bleeding, while another was actually buried under the ruins. Sometimes they were almost suffocated by the stifling heat; at other times they were plunged for hours up to their necks in the freezing waters of some subterranean torrent; sometimes blocked up by a falling mass without light or escape.'

The third difficulty was want of money; for when Warren left London he carried off all the money of the Fund (300*l.*) for the expenses of the party, the Committee hoping that, as the excavations proceeded, public interest would be shown by a flow of subscriptions. The Com-

mittee said : ‘ Give us results and you can have money.’ Warren replied : ‘ No money, no results.’ In fact, however, he had at one time advanced no less than 1,000*l.* out of his own resources.

The work went on for some three years with occasional interruptions. Warren returned home in 1870, and spent the following year in preparing the results of his work for the Committee of the Fund and for the Press.

Sir Walter Besant, in his ‘ Twenty-one Years’ Work in the Holy Land,’ writes :

‘ It is impossible here to do more than to recapitulate the principal results of the excavations, which are without parallel for the difficulties presented and the courage displayed in overcoming them. . . . It is certain that nothing will ever be done in the future to compare with what was done by Warren. . . . It was Warren who restored the ancient city to the world ; he it was who stripped the rubbish from the rocks and showed the glorious temple standing within its walls 1,000 feet long, and 200 feet high, of mighty masonry : he it was who laid open the valleys now covered up and hidden ; he who opened the secret passages, the

ancient aqueducts, the bridge connecting the temple and the town. Whatever else may be done in the future, his name will always be associated with the Holy City which he first recovered.'

So much was this the case that for a long time he was known as 'Jerusalem Warren.'

In addition to 'Underground Jerusalem' he wrote 'The Temple or the Tomb.'

What high value was placed upon Captain Warren's services by the Administration of the Fund may be gathered from the following quotation from 'Our Work in Palestine,' published by Bentley & Son in 1875, a book which had then reached its eighth thousand :—

'Let us finally bear witness to the untiring perseverance, courage, and ability of Captain Warren. Those of us who know best under what difficulties he had to work can tell with what courage and patience they were met and overcome. Physical suffering and long endurance of heat, cold, and danger were nothing. There were besides anxieties of digging in the dark, anxieties as to local prejudice, anxieties for the lives of brave men—Sergeant Birtles and

the rest of his Staff—anxieties which we may not speak of here. He has his reward, it is true. So long as an interest in the modern history of Jerusalem remains, so long as people are concerned to know how sacred sites have been found out, so long will the name of Captain Warren survive.'

DOVER, SHOEBURYNESS, AND THE ORDNANCE
FACTORIES, 1871 TO 1876

In 1871 Warren returned to military duty, and was posted to Dover in command of the 10th Company of Royal Engineers, and for the next year was employed on the fortifications of the fortress, principally at Dover Castle and Castle Hill and Fort (Fort Burgoyne). He was then transferred, in 1872, to the School of Gunnery at Shoeburyness, where he remained for three years, and was very successful in his administration of the Engineer duties in regard both to the barracks and the experiments with big guns and iron plates carried out by the Ordnance Committee. He had also Engineer charge of the gunpowder magazine at Purfleet.

On his departure, in 1875, to take Engineer

charge of the Gunpowder and Small-arm Factories at Waltham Abbey and Enfield, he received the highest commendation from the Commandant of the School of Gunnery, who wrote to the War Office that Captain Warren's professional reputation as a highly instructed and accomplished officer was so well established that it was unnecessary to refer to it, beyond stating that the station had benefited largely by his administration in carrying out the important duties entrusted to him, and that he placed on record not only the support and assistance received from him in all official matters, but that his social relations with the Commandant and all other officers of the establishment rendered his departure a subject of sincere regret to all.

He was a candidate in 1876 for the secretaryship of the Royal Engineers' Institute, when Colonel (afterwards Sir) Peter Scratchley observed in his recommendation : ' Captain Warren has been under my command for four and a half years, and is, in my opinion, a most able, conscientious, indefatigable officer, and one who would do credit to the Corps wherever employed. His literary tastes, general experience, and quali-

fications particularly fit him for the appointment he is desirous of obtaining.'

Although unsuccessful his services were to be utilised in a wider sphere than his own Corps.

In October 1876 he was asked by the Colonial Office to undertake the duty of laying down the boundary line between Griqualand West and the Orange Free State, and his services were at once lent by the War Department. On leaving England he received a letter from Lord Carnarvon's private secretary saying how much the Colony was to be congratulated on having obtained his services, and another from his late chief, Colonel Scratchley, regretting his departure and expressing his belief that he 'would never meet an abler officer or a better fellow.'

SOUTH AFRICA, 1876 TO 1879

Griqualand West and the Orange Free State Boundary

The necessity for laying down a boundary line between Griqualand West and the Orange Free State had arisen from the rival claims of the Chief Waterboer of the Griquas and of

President Brand of the Orange Free State to the Diamond Fields. The British Government acquired the rights of the Waterboer, and, after some protracted negotiations, it was arranged that the Orange Free State should abandon its claim on receiving from Griqualand West the sum of 90,000*l*. Mr. de Villiers was the expert nominated by the Orange Free State to be associated with Captain Warren in laying out the boundary.

Warren, with two non-commissioned officers of Royal Engineers, arrived at Cape Town towards the end of November, and, after an interview with the Governor, Sir Henry Barkly, proceeded to Port Elizabeth by steamer, and thence by coach, *viâ* Graham's Town and Cradock, to Kimberley, where Major Owen Lanyon, the Administrator, introduced him to his colleague, Mr. Joseph E. de Villiers, Government Surveyor. After an interview with President Brand at Bloemfontein he went into camp outside Kimberley towards the end of December, measured his base, took observations, and elaborated his general scheme of operations.

The heat was intense, the shade temperature

being over 100° Fahr. for hours together, the atmosphere was highly charged with electricity, and the thunderstorms were often terrific, the lightning playing all round the encampment or party, and the ground being struck in all directions. Mosquitoes and flies were also a great nuisance.

The work, however, proceeded satisfactorily and expeditiously, and on 18th April 1877 was completed and ready for inspection. A party composed of the two Commissioners and officials of the two States formally inspected the line from the Vaal to the Orange River, 120 miles, and an official notification of the completion of the work was made to the respective Governments. The plans were then drawn on a scale of three miles to the inch and completed before 15th May. Captain Warren was entertained by President Brand at Bloemfontein to meet the Volksraad at dinner. Votes of thanks from the Legislatures of Griqualand West and the Orange Free State were presented to each of the Commissioners, the former illuminated and very handsomely got up.

Griqualand West Land Claims

Sending his party home, Warren went to Kimberley, and thence to Pretoria and the Gold Fields and on to Delagoa Bay, intending to go to England by Zanzibar. An interesting account of this journey appeared in 'Good Words' two years ago. From Delagoa Bay, however, he was directed to return to Cape Town to see Sir Bartle Frere, and on arrival there was appointed Special Commissioner in Griqualand West for six months to investigate and arrange the various land cases in appeal before the High Court of Griqualand West. This delicate mission he accomplished with great ability, tact, and judgment, settling 220 out of 240 cases to general satisfaction, except that of the lawyers, and avoiding a great amount of litigation. He was made a Companion of St. Michael and St. George for his work on the boundary, and received a letter from H.R.H. the Duke of Cambridge, Commander-in-Chief, expressing his great satisfaction at the efficient manner in which he had performed the duties entrusted to him of marking off the boundary between the Orange Free State and

Griqualand West, and also of the settlement of the land claims in the latter province.

Meeting with Mr. Cecil Rhodes

It was on his way to Kimberley from Cape Town viâ Port Elizabeth on this land claim business in Griqualand that he had the late Mr. Cecil Rhodes as his travelling companion. As they were driving over the brown veldt from Dordrecht to Jamestown, Warren noticed that Mr. Rhodes, who sat opposite to him, was evidently engaged in learning something by heart, and offered to hear him. It turned out to be the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England. In the diary of this journey, also published in 'Good Words' of 1900, Warren relates : ' We got on very well until we arrived at the article on predestination, and there we stuck. He had his views and I had mine, and our fellow-passengers were greatly amused at the topic of our conversation—for several hours—being on one subject. Rhodes is going in for his degree at home, and works out here during the vacation.'

The Gaika War, 1878

In January 1878 Warren proceeded to the Gaika war in command of the Diamond Fields Horse, raised at Kimberley, and was engaged for six months in Kaffraria. He bought his mounts and drilled his men on the way, and infused his own indomitable energy into every member of his command. He took part in numerous engagements, among which may be mentioned the action of Perie Bush in March, when he was injured by the falling of the bough of a tree, and the action at Debe Nek on 5th April, where with seventy-five of the Diamond Fields Horse he met 1,200 armed Kafirs of Seyolo's tribe in the open, and gained a complete victory. The Governor-in-Chief telegraphed his congratulations on this brilliant success. A few weeks later Warren had another successful fight at Tabi Ndoda on 29th April, when he was slightly wounded. He was frequently mentioned in despatches, and his conspicuous personal bravery, no less than his skill as a commander, was brought to the notice of the Secretary of State for War. The Governor-in-Chief especially commended him in his

despatches for 'energy, ability, and resource displayed under most trying circumstances.' He had been promoted to be Major on 10th April 1878, and his services in the campaign were recognised by a brevet-lieutenant-colonelcy, dated 11th November 1878, and the South African medal.

*Native Rebellion in Griqualand West and
Troubles with the Bechuanas, 1878-9*

Early in May the whole native population of Griqualand West, west of the Vaal river, broke out in rebellion and, joining their former enemies, the Kaal Kafirs (refugees from Cape Colony), commenced depredations to the west of Griquatown. In consequence of this critical state of affairs in Griqualand West the Executive Government telegraphed for the assistance of Warren and the Diamond Fields Horse from the Cape Colony. The regiment left King William's Town on 14th May and arrived at Griquatown on 10th June.

While Colonels Lanyon and Warren were fighting the rebels in the far west the Bechuanas made incursions over the northern border,

murdering the white residents at Daniel's Kuil and Cornforth Hill, wrecking the mission station at Moteto in Bechuanaland, and threatening the lives of the traders and missionaries in Kuruman itself. Lanyon and Warren fought several successful actions with the insurgent Griquas and Kaal Kafirs, particularly that at Paarde Kloof on 18th June. Lanyon then returned to Kimberley, leaving Warren in command of the Field Force with instructions to proceed to the northern border in case assistance were required there. Commandant Ford had been sent to the northern border for the express purpose of saving the Kuruman mission station, and on 2nd July met with a repulse at Koning (close to the border of Griqualand), but defeated the enemy at Manyering on 8th July, and the following day arrived at Kuruman. His force, however, was too small to do more than act on the defensive, and he asked for assistance. Warren arrived with the Field Force at Kuruman on 14th July, and Lanyon with a detachment of troops on the 16th. On the 18th Warren's force attacked Gomaperi successfully, and on 23rd July carried Takoon by assault; and in August the

force returned to Kimberley, leaving a garrison to protect Kuruman.

In consequence of the rebels joining with the Bechuanas it was found necessary to continue the war, for Kuruman and Griqualand were both threatened. Warren was again entrusted with the command of the Field Forces on 21st September, and signally defeated the combined forces of the Griquas, Bechuanas, and Old Colony Kafirs on 11th, 12th, and 14th October at Mokolokue's Mountain. He then issued a proclamation, which exhibited both firmness and tact, and offered an amnesty to all but the ring-leaders and murderers. This had a good effect.

Hostilities recommenced on the northern border (Cape Colony) in January 1879, and subsequently in Bechuanaland and the Keate Award, and the Griqualand West forces were ordered to co-operate with those of the Cape Colony. On 11th February Warren was appointed Acting Administrator of Griqualand West and disarmed all the natives. During this and the following month the whole country was disturbed in consequence of the disaster at Isandhlwana, and Warren offered to take 500 white troops to the

assistance of Lord Chelmsford, but it was not considered desirable to take 500 white men away from Kimberley at so critical a time. As Special Commissioner Warren inquired into the land question of the Bloemhof districts, and in April commanded the Griqualand West Field Forces in the northern border of Cape Colony, and made arrangements to prevent the rebels breaking through again into Griqualand West. They were thus forced into Bechuanaland, and in conjunction with the Bechuanas again threatened Kuruman. The Bechuana and Griqua ringleaders and the Cape Colony rebels were defeated and captured by the Griqualand West forces in August, and Warren was able to reduce the strength of his columns in the field. He was invalided home in the autumn on account of the hurt he sustained from the falling tree. He left the Cape much to the regret of the South African people, among whom his name had become a household word, and his departure was regarded by them in the light of a personal loss. For his services during the past year he received a clasp to his South African medal and nothing more.

The Colonial Office made a strenuous but

unsuccessful endeavour to procure for him a brevet-colonelcy, and made the following representation to the War Office in December 1879 :

‘ Until August 1878 Colonel Lanyon appears to have remained in the field, but Lieut.-Colonel Warren, though not occupying a higher position than that of Chief of Colonel Lanyon’s Staff, appears to have acted to a great extent independently and not under his immediate supervision ; and when, at the close of the engagement of 18th June at the Paarde Kloof, Colonel Lanyon arrived with the Southern Column, he left Lieut.-Colonel Warren in command to complete the victory, considering that the entire credit of the brilliant success then attained was due to Lieut.-Colonel Warren.

‘ In the operations at Kuruman and the capture of Litako and Takoon Lieut.-Colonel Warren not only behaved with dashing personal bravery as on previous occasions, but contributed materially to the success of an operation which in many particulars clearly resembled those just concluded against Morosi’s Mountain and Sekukuni’s Town.

‘In September 1878 Colonel Lanyon, being fully occupied with the civil duties of his office, despatched Lieut.-Colonel Warren in independent command of a Colonial force organised by him, to operate against a combination of Griquas, Korannas, and Bechuanas who were assembled at the Mokolokue’s Mountain on the confines of the Kalahari desert, and were threatening the province with invasion. It will be seen from the Reports that Lieut.-Colonel Warren had here again to deal with the problem of capturing a fortified mountain, which had proved so difficult in recent South African warfare; and he effected his object by a brilliant strategical movement, taking the enemy in reverse, and driving them at once from their most formidable lines of defence, the work of clearing them from krantzes, in which they subsequently took up position, being successfully accomplished on the same day.

‘In January 1879 Warren succeeded Colonel Lanyon in the civil administration of Griqualand West, but still retained the military command in the province, and either personally conducted or directed further operations in the

south of the province, and to the north and north-west, beyond the provincial border. . . .

‘Not only were Lieut.-Colonel Warren’s military operations successful throughout, but they were accompanied by a large measure of political success ; his tact, humanity, and moderation in victory having done much to convert our enemies into friends, and to promote the permanent pacification of the districts to the north of the Orange River, over which our influence extends.

‘Lieut.-Colonel Warren has already been rewarded for his services in the Gaika war by the brevet of lieut.-colonel, but his subsequent services in Griqualand West form a distinct and very creditable episode in the history of the recent South African warfare, for which Sir Michael Hicks-Beach hopes that he may be considered entitled to fresh recognition in the form of the brevet of colonel, or such other mark of approbation as Colonel Stanley and H.R.H. the Field-Marshal Commanding-in-Chief may think proper to recommend.

‘The operations of 1878–9 throughout South Africa should be regarded as a whole, and Sir

Michael Hicks-Beach trusts that officers of the Regular Army who have organised and led to victory the Colonial Levies in separate commands may be thought not less deserving of the usual military rewards than officers who have served under the immediate direction of the General Commanding-in-Chief in leading her Majesty's Regular Troops ; indeed, those of the former class have some special claims to consideration on account of the difficulties which they had to overcome ; and in organising not only a combatant force, but also the Transport, Commissariat, Pay and Hospital Departments of that force, Lieut.-Colonel Warren displayed a general knowledge of his profession which marks him as an especially intelligent and valuable servant of the Queen.'

CHATHAM, 1880 TO 1882

The voyage home from South Africa was very beneficial to Warren's health, and early in 1880 he was able to take up the duties of the post of Instructor of Surveying at the School of Military Engineering at Chatham, to which he had been appointed. It would be too little to

say he entered with his usual zest into his new duties, because he delighted in surveying, and nothing pleased him better than to have a number of young officers to train in all its branches, and to instruct in practical astronomy after Mess in the R.E. Observatory, to say nothing of the large classes of officers of the Line which passed through his hands and the training of the Sappers of his own Corps. In 1881 Warren contributed to the Professional Papers of the Royal Engineers a paper on the Boundary Line between the Orange Free State and Griqualand West.

EGYPT AND ARABIA PETRÆA, 1882 TO 1883

But the even tenor of his way was broken in upon suddenly in the summer of 1882. It may, perhaps, be remembered that when events in Egypt in 1882 made it likely that we should have to undertake military operations in that country, Professor Palmer, Professor of Arabic at Cambridge, who was well acquainted with Syria and Arabia, and Captain Gill, R.E., a distinguished traveller, were sent in June to win over the chiefs of the Bedouin tribes in the South

of Syria and on the borders of the Suez Canal. They successfully accomplished their journey and arrived at Suez on 1st August. Professor Palmer reported that the Bedouins were favourably disposed, and that plenty of camels could be procured for the army. On 8th August he left Suez to go to Nakhl in the desert, half way between Suez and Akaba, to procure camels for the Indian contingent. He was accompanied by Captain Gill, who was attached to the Intelligence Department, and whose mission was to cut the telegraph line in the desert, and by Lieut. Charrington, R.N., flag-lieutenant to Admiral Sir William Hewett. The party carried 3,000*l.* in gold, and, although provided with a guide, no escort was taken, as no danger was apprehended. Soon after the party left Moses Wells opposite Suez, rumours reached Suez that their baggage had been plundered. Inquiries were set on foot in all directions with no definite result, and the country and the Government were alarmed and feared that some disaster had occurred.

Lieut.-Colonel Charles Warren, whose experience and qualification for dealing with an

inquiry among Arabs were highly thought of, was selected by the Government to go on special service under the Admiralty and take charge of a search expedition, and, should the rumours of the murder of the party prove true, to bring the murderers to justice. The task was a difficult and an exceptionally dangerous one—to go into the desert and search among the wild Bedouin tribes for the ill-fated expedition, with no loyal Arabs who could be called upon to assist.

Warren went off in August at twelve hours' notice to Egypt, and, after reporting to the Admiral, proceeded to Tor, and at a later date to Akaba by steamer. He found the Arabs at both places singularly indisposed to enter into any communications; but up to the end of September, and even later, he did not despair of the travellers being still alive, and it was not until 24th October that he could report with certainty the story of their tragic deaths on the previous 10th August, and that he had found their remains.

Having no friendly Arabs to depend upon, Warren had to resort to the expedient of suddenly swooping down on some Bedouins about Zagazig, who had been fighting against us a week

before, and capturing several hundreds of them. These he sorted out, imprisoning some as hostages, and taking 220, selected from various tribes, with him as an escort into the desert. He was accompanied by Lieutenants Burton and Haynes and Quartermaster-Sergeant Kennedy, all of the Royal Engineers. After ascertaining that Professor Palmer had been murdered, the expedition entered the desert in search of the murderers; Warren made his arrangements for their capture, and succeeded in taking eight out of fifteen. These were brought to trial, convicted, and hanged.

During his hazardous operations Warren visited Akaba, where Arabi's flag was flying, and reduced it to submission. He also captured Nakhl in the desert, which he reduced by surrounding it and cutting off supplies; this caused a mutiny in the garrison and they capitulated.

In the House of Commons on 16th November Mr. Gladstone said that 'Colonel Warren had performed the task of investigating the circumstances of the murders with great energy and judgment, as well as knowledge.'

On 27th November Admiral Sir Beauchamp

Seymour conveyed to Warren by letter his entire approbation of the means he had adopted 'at much personal danger to ascertain the fate of Professor Palmer and his comrades. The perseverance and zeal,' he says, 'manifested by you and by the subaltern officers of the Royal Engineers under your orders, more especially during the trying march between Nakhil and the Suez Canal, reflect the greatest credit on the noble Corps to which you belong.'

An Admiralty letter of 4th December 1882 to Lord Alcester desires him to inform Colonel Warren that the Lords of the Admiralty 'are very grateful to him for the energy, courage, and good judgment with which he has prosecuted the inquiry, under circumstances of considerable difficulty and danger.' And again on 1st January 1883 Captain Stephenson, the senior naval officer, conveyed their Lordships' 'high appreciation of the manner in which Colonel Warren had performed the difficult task of ascertaining the fate of Professor Palmer's party.' Captain Stephenson, who was at Suez when the search was going on, added: 'I wish to add my testimony to the patient, but energetic

and persevering, manner in which you have traced the sad fate of the missing party, against many adverse circumstances in a part of the country so desolate that assistance from me would have been of no avail had any untoward circumstances occurred to your party.'

On 22nd January the Admiralty renewed their expression of their very high appreciation of Warren's services, and the Commander-in-Chief of the army, H.R.H. the Duke of Cambridge, informed him of his high satisfaction at receiving a very favourable report from the Admiralty on the able manner in which he had carried out the duty entrusted to him, and his own appreciation of the 'hazardous services' he had performed. Warren, who was already a brevet-colonel,¹ was promoted to be a Knight Commander of St. Michael and St. George on the Queen's birthday, 24th May, and the Admiralty congratulated him in a letter of 25th May 1883, expressing the gratification felt by the Board at this mark of the Queen's approval of the most valuable services which he had rendered to her Majesty's Government through-

¹ 11th November 1882.

out the whole time he was engaged in investigating the circumstances of the murder of Professor Palmer and his party, and in bringing the guilty persons to justice. Lieut.-General Sir Andrew Clarke, Inspector-General of Fortifications, wrote to him in January 1883: 'You are doing your mission right well; we are all proud of you.' Lord Northbrook wrote in the same sense, and afterwards told Sir Charles Warren that his exertions had saved the country an expenditure of at least two millions on an expedition into the desert, which must have been undertaken had he been unsuccessful. Warren received the Egyptian medal and bronze star, and was also decorated by the Khedive with the third class of the Order of the Mejidie.

CHATHAM, 1883-4

On his return home he resumed his duties at Chatham as the head of the Surveying School. In 1884, when General Gordon was shut up in Khartoum and completely cut off by the Mahdi, Warren volunteered to go through Abyssinia and open communication with his old

friend. He was for some time in correspondence with Mr. W. E. Forster on the subject, and Lieut.-General Sir Andrew Clarke highly approved of the proposal, and wrote a minute in favour of it. In the end, however, the idea was abandoned when it was decided to send a relief expedition under Lord Wolseley. Warren found time during 1883 to write a pamphlet giving a concise account of the military occupation of South Bechuanaland in 1878-9, and he also contributed to the Professional Papers of the Corps of Royal Engineers 'Notes on Arabia Petraea and the Country lying between Egypt and Palestine.'

BECHUANALAND EXPEDITION, 1884-5

In that part of Bechuanaland lying to the north of Griqualand West, the white man had been rapidly encroaching upon native territory since the days when Warren commanded the Field Force of Griqualand West and prevented the Bechuanas invading the province. Two republics had been established in Bechuanaland; one, called Stellaland, in which English and Dutch adventurers had already taken possession

of the land, 'eaten up' the native tribes, and become to some extent a settled people; the other, named Goshenland, in which Transvaal filibustering Boers plundered and oppressed the native race, and treated it with cruelty. These raiding Boers were supported by the Transvaal Government, which, since the so-called 'magnanimous' settlement, after the Majuba defeat of the British, and the exposure of the weak and vacillating policy of the British Government in the South African Colonies, had steadily set before it the substitution of a Dutch South Africa for a British, and had exhibited a contempt for the Queen's authority which was rapidly developing.

All attempts to arrange with Mr. Kruger, President of the Transvaal Republic, for an equitable settlement of the Bechuanaland questions having failed, and further negotiations being useless, the Government had nothing left to them but to employ force. It was, however, desirable, in sending troops into the country to enforce the views of the Government, that the commander should be a man who had not only a thorough knowledge of the country and of the

questions in dispute, but was also regarded as an authority in the settlement of land questions by both the British colonists and the Boers. In this way it was hoped that perhaps the moral support of an adequate force might enable him to settle matters satisfactorily, without having recourse to fighting.

Colonel Sir Charles Warren was the man who best fulfilled the required conditions, and was selected for the command of the expedition, given the local rank of Major-General, and appointed Special Commissioner.

A force of 5,000 men was raised and equipped, and supplemented by special troops and corps from home, one of which was Methuen's Horse. Warren's instructions were to remove the filibusters from Bechuanaland, to restore order in the territory, to reinstate the natives in their lands, to take measures to prevent further depreciation, and finally to hold the country until its further destination was known. As Special Commissioner he was to be under the directions of Sir Hercules Robinson, Governor of the Cape Colony and High Commissioner in South Africa, but was to be left a large discretion as regards

local matters. In regard to operations in the field, he was to be responsible to the Secretary of State for War and the General Commanding in South Africa, and was not to be accountable to the Colonial Government or the High Commissioner.

Sir Charles Warren landed at Cape Town on 4th December 1884, and soon pushed his force up country into the disputed territory. The promptness with which he moved, and the efficiency of his force gave him the moral support which he required in carrying on negotiations with Mr. Kruger, and in these diplomatic dealings he exhibited the ability and tact which had distinguished him on previous occasions when called upon to settle disputes of a similar kind.

An officer of the expedition wrote home in August 1885 :

‘Immediately after I despatched my last, it became evident that this Bechuanaland business was practically played out as a campaign. I should think there never before was such a case of a brilliantly executed advance into a distant country, followed by such complete inanition, as has fallen upon everybody (except, of course, the

General Officer Commanding, who has had plenty to do politically) as took place here. By 2nd April the General and Headquarters Staff were fully established up at Mafeking (Rooi Grond), with telegraphic communication—220 miles, working without a hitch, I am glad to say—from end to end of the occupied country, and stores enough along the whole length of line to feed the entire army for three months. It really was a master stroke, considering the slowness of transport, the sandy state of much of the road, and the scarcity of water. But when one has said that one has said everything—since that time we, as an expedition, have simply been standing still.’

But ‘they also serve who only stand and wait,’ and while the expedition was chafing at being kept idle, with no fighting to do, and the prospect of rewards and distinctions for the campaign fading away, the moral effect of its presence made itself felt. The Transvaal Government, finding itself unprepared to fight, changed its attitude and Sir Charles Warren was able to make a peaceful settlement with Mr. Kruger, though not without many difficulties. He returned to England after a bloodless cam-

paign, receiving the thanks of Parliament and of the Colonial Legislature, and promotion to the Grand Cross of the Order of St. Michael and St. George. But he was not made a supernumerary major-general after holding that rank in the field, and, on his return, reverted to the rank of colonel.

CANDIDATE FOR PARLIAMENT, 1885

At the General Election of the autumn of 1885 Sir Charles Warren was invited to stand as a candidate for Parliament to represent the Hallam division of Sheffield in the Liberal interest, and in his address he took an independent position, making no mention of any party leader.

The principal points he laid stress on were :

(1) The Empire could not stand still. 'Forward' must be the motto.

(2) The prosperity of the nation depended on the moral tone of the people continuing at a high standard, which could only be maintained by unremitting attention to the religious education of the children. Instruction, therefore, in the truths of Christianity must be real and efficient.

(3) Education must be sound both as to mind

and body, and in elementary schools must be free, and the greatest attention paid to physical training.

(4) The connection between the Mother Country and the Colonies must be strengthened, a fixed colonial policy should be established clear of party politics, and a federal parliament of the Empire should be looked forward to.

(5) Ireland must remain part of the United Kingdom, but the greatest amount of self-government practicable should be accorded to it.

(6) County Councils should be established.

(7) Disestablishment of Church with State only desirable if wanted by both sides.

(8) Local option.

(9) Reforms regarding land tenure.

(10) Reform of House of Lords.

(11) Reforms in House of Commons to prevent obstruction.

Sir Charles was unsuccessful at the poll, but he had so won the hearts of the Liberal constituents that they paid the whole of his election expenses, and, on his leaving the constituency, presented him with an address and a handsome case of Sheffield plate and cutlery.

SUAKIN, 1886

In January 1886 Sir Charles Warren was appointed to command the troops at Suakin, with the rank of Major-General on the Staff, and to be Governor of the Red Sea Littoral. On arrival at his headquarters, Suakin, he was greeted by a telegram from Simla containing congratulations on his appointment from Lord Dufferin, under whom he had served diplomatically when he was engaged in the Palmer Search Expedition.

Warren found that the Suakin garrison was composed of three nationalities—British, Indian, and Egyptian—all acting under different regulations, and he at once set to work to introduce a better organisation into the garrison, and to have a mobile force to drive inland the Hadendowa Arabs, who were in the habit of firing into Suakin every night. He took the friendly natives into service and put them in the field against the Hadendowas, and in a few days had a clear zone of several miles round the town. He also commenced arrangements to open up the country as far as Berber and to start commercial operations at various ports on the Red

Sea, to open up salt works, &c. ; but he found no response from the Egyptian authorities at Cairo, and soon discovered that they did not wish to encourage trade by Suakin, as it would reduce that going through Cairo.

After three months in this appointment, when he was beginning to find that there was nothing to do but to sit down and hold the place, he received a telegram from Mr. Childers, the Home Secretary, offering him the Chief Commissionership of the Metropolitan Police, at a time when there had been a considerable panic in London, and Sir Edmund Henderson had resigned the office. He accepted the offer, and left Suakin at the end of March. Before leaving he received a very sympathetic address from the merchants in Suakin, recognising the effort he had made on behalf of trade with the interior and along the coast.

CHIEF COMMISSIONERSHIP OF POLICE, 1886 TO 1888

In his new position Warren had several difficult and complicated problems to deal with. During the very first year of office the Trafalgar

Square demonstrations, permitted by a weak Government, tested the powers of the police under their new chief to preserve public order. The Liberal party abused their own nominee, but he was firm. Then there were all the arrangements for the preservation of order at the Queen's Jubilee in 1887, which were so ably carried out. He received many complimentary letters : one from the Home Secretary expressing her Majesty's entire approbation of the excellent manner in which the arrangements for preserving good order were made by him ; another from the Commander-in-Chief, H.R.H. the Duke of Cambridge, congratulating him on the admirable manner in which they were carried out, which in his opinion left nothing to be desired, and reflected the greatest credit on the Metropolitan Police Force ; in a third the Prince of Wales, as Chairman of the Children's Jubilee Festival, caused his thanks to be conveyed to him for the invaluable assistance he lent on the occasion ; and finally Lord Salisbury informed him that he was very glad to be the medium of acquainting him that the Queen had been pleased to confer upon him, in special recognition of his

exertions in maintaining order in the metropolis during the past difficult year, and of his services at the Jubilee celebrations, a Knight Commandership of the Order of the Bath.

In July appeared a cartoon in 'Punch' with the following legend :

All honour to your management, my Warren,
All honour to the force you featly led !
And that honour, Punch opines, should not be barren
(May he hear hereafter more upon *that* head).
'Midst the Jubilee joyous pageantry and pother,
(Though 'tis common of our Bobbies to make fun)
'Taking one consideration with another,'
The Policemen's work was excellently done.

Other difficulties he had to try him during his term of office were an outbreak of burglaries, the muzzling of dogs, and the Whitechapel murders, all of which irritated the public and caused the police to be abused. He was not the man to stand by and hear his force unjustly criticised without defending it, and he contributed an article to 'Murray's Magazine' on the subject.

In the spring of 1888 he did not think the Home Secretary, Mr. Matthews, gave him sufficient support, but rather endeavoured to minimise his authority as head of the force, and he tendered

his resignation. This was not accepted, and he continued in his post until the autumn, when he decided that he could no longer hold the appointment with due regard to the good of the force and his own credit.

The resignation was fully debated in the House of Commons on 14th November 1888, when the Home Secretary said :

‘He was glad to have the opportunity furnished by what fell from the Hon. Member for the Horsham Division, to do the fullest justice to Sir Charles Warren. Sir Charles Warren was a man not only of the highest character, but of great ability. During his tenure of the office he had displayed the most indefatigable activity in every detail of the organisation and administration of the force. By his vigour and firmness he had restored that confidence in the police which had been shaken—he believed with the right hon. gentleman, unjustly shaken—after the regrettable incident of 1886. . . . Sir Charles Warren had shown conspicuous skill and firmness in putting an end to disorder in the metropolis, and for that he deserved the highest praise.’

Again there appeared a cartoon in 'Punch' entitled 'Extremes Meet,' in which Sir Charles Warren and his predecessor were depicted exchanging views :

SIR EDMUND : My dear Warren, you did too much.

SIR CHARLES : And you, my dear Henderson, did too little.

MR. PUNCH : H'm! Sorry for the *new* man.

It was during his police work that he attended the meeting of the British Association at Manchester in 1887 as President of the Geographical Section and gave a very practical and useful opening address.

STRAITS SETTLEMENTS, 1889 TO 1894

After some months of leisure Warren was appointed to command the troops in the Straits Settlements in April 1889, as a Colonel on the Staff with the rank of Major-General. Hitherto this command had been one with that of Hong-Kong, where the Headquarters were ; but, owing to friction arising in 1888 between the civil and military authorities in the Straits Settlements, it was decided to send out an officer to Singapore in independent command

to endeavour to make things work smoothly. The difficulties arose from the peculiar nature of the agreement which had been made with the Straits Settlements when they were detached from India and established as a Crown Colony.

Sir Charles Warren soon found that the existing system was impracticable for efficiency, and it was altered, but in carrying out the alteration there arose a good deal of difference of opinion between the civil and military authorities. Moreover, as a member of council, Sir Charles Warren came to the conclusion that the annual military contribution should be a sum calculated *pro rata* to the revenue up to the amount required. This gave great offence to the colonists, who wished for a fixed sum, which was finally agreed to. But in two years the revenue of the Colony rapidly diminished owing to changes in the opium farming, &c., and the people found themselves paying a much higher sum than they would have done according to Sir Charles Warren's proposal. Then they recognised his foresight, and popular feeling changed in his favour.

During the five years Sir Charles was in the Straits Settlements he did much travelling and occupied in the aggregate ten months (his two months' leave per annum) in seeing India, Ceylon, Burma, Siam, Java, Japan, and some of the seaports of China. The Straits Settlements being within his command, he visited the several States as a duty, and, by request, inspected the armed constabulary (Sikhs) of Perak and Selangor and the troops of the Sultan of Johore. He penetrated into the uncivilised parts of the Straits Settlements and traversed the peninsula from east to west, over the mountains from Selangor to Pahang, through the Sakai country. At the time of the Pahang outbreak he was ready with his troops for all emergencies, and prepared and printed a field book for use in the jungle, should circumstances require it.

He encouraged sports among officers and men, and did much to keep up a good feeling between the troops and the inhabitants, and established (under the Garrison Sports Committee) four yearly events, for which he gave suitable challenge shields. The contests for these prizes had a stimulating effect on sport in the Malay peninsula.

In addition to his military duties he was for several months chairman of a committee to inspect and report on the police of the Straits Settlements. As District Grand Master of the Eastern Archipelago, he visited the several Masonic Lodges, presided at various functions, and, on his leaving the Settlements, was presented by the fraternity with a full-sized portrait of himself and a very handsomely illuminated address.

The readiness of the garrison of Singapore for defence was brought to a high pitch of perfection during his tenure of command. When he first arrived it took several weeks to mobilise, and, after much practice, he reduced the time to three days; when he arrived at this, he saw it was not perfect unless it could be done in *three hours*, and this was accomplished eventually. A practical test of this was given. One evening, when he was dining at Government House to meet the Admiral Commanding-in-Chief, the latter began to chaff at the unreadiness of the army in comparison with the navy, and asserted his opinion that Singapore could not mobilise under three weeks. Sir Charles

said that the Admiral would have to admit that it could be done in three hours, and guaranteed that, if the Admiral would be out at 6 A.M. at the jetty, he would find all the troops in their places, although some of them would have to march six miles or more in the dark, and cross the water in launches. The only point that would not be the same as in time of war was the getting the launches into their places, as they were in peace positions at the time. At 11 P.M. Sir Charles Warren ordered the launches to be in position at 3 A.M. and sent word to the troops to get ready at 1 A.M. They marched down from Tanglin and Fort Canning Barracks to the wharf, were taken across in launches and submarine miners, and were all in their places at 6 A.M., when the Governor and Admiral visited them in company with Sir Charles Warren. The Admiral gave the highest praise a sailor could give—that it had been done as well as if it had been done by the navy.

His services at Singapore are summed up in an article in the 'Straits Times' of 2nd April 1894, from which the following is an extract:

'It is no new thing to speak praise of Sir

Charles Warren ; and in trying to estimate the services that he has rendered to the Colony it is difficult to do more than repeat ourselves. We have already said he found in Singapore a number of soldiers and some forts, while he leaves at Singapore a garrison in a fortress. He leaves a fortress that is one of the strongest in Asia, and he leaves a garrison whose readiness and perfection of mobilisation cannot be surpassed. But on that it does not seem necessary to enlarge, since it is a service that any soldier of first-rate capacity would have done, and all competent persons knew that Sir Charles Warren would do it. It is, perhaps, more interesting to record that in his time Sir Charles Warren has been the best abused man in the Colony, while at his departure he is as universally esteemed as any man could be. It is but a couple of years ago that he was the subject of persistent slander at the hands of persons who now sing his praises and lament his departure. That conquest of enmity Sir Charles has achieved by means at once simple and wise. When he was the subject of detraction he paid no attention, but proceeded quietly about the affairs he had in hand.

When the persons who had attacked him repented of their methods, he ignored that he had been attacked, and dealt with the advances of his new friends as if he had not known that they had been unfriendly. To put it briefly, he proceeded on the path of duty regardless either of praise or blame, until better knowledge rendered it impossible for any one to persist in detraction. Sir Charles leaves the Colony amidst a universal chorus of friendly greetings. To have achieved such a conquest of public opinion amidst so small a community is a great result. For the community is so small that no man can live in it for a number of years without giving ample opportunity to see his character in all its moods and tenses. From that scrutiny Sir Charles Warren has emerged with success. The community of the Straits feels that in losing him it loses not only a soldier and a scholar, but also a most excellent example of a kindly and simple-hearted gentleman.'

At one of the many farewell dinners in his honour Sir Charles Mitchell, the Governor, said : ' Each man in his turn played many parts, but of all men he had known through his experience of

this somewhat difficult world, he knew none who in these times had played so many parts, and played all those parts so well, as their distinguished guest, Sir Charles Warren. As a man of letters, and as a man of action, Sir Charles Warren had distinguished himself.'

Although, when Sir Cecil Smith was Governor, official difficulties occurred between him and Sir Charles Warren on matters which could not readily be settled, yet the differences were solely official, and Sir Cecil Smith was one of the first to send Sir Charles Warren, when he was leaving England in November 1899 for Natal, hearty good wishes for his success and safe return with added glory to the high reputation he had already gained. Sir Charles Warren left the Straits Settlements on his return to England in April 1894, and he travelled by way of Vancouver and the American Continent, spending some weeks in exploring the Western States of the Union.

THAMES DISTRICT, 1895 TO 1898

In 1895 Sir Charles Warren was appointed Major-General commanding the Thames District,

and was told that he was to organise the mobilisation of the Thames District for defence on the same model he had so successfully established at Singapore. He took it in hand at once, and in two years had so perfected the system that all troops coming into the district were enabled on sudden mobilisation to find their places and take up their duties immediately.

He was busily engaged, during his term of command, in the problem of defence of the Thames and Medway, in which a great advance was made, and in examining into the efficiency of the Royal Engineers for active service in all their branches, and frequently inspected them with this object in view.

He instituted field days between the various garrisons ; marched all the infantry to Sheerness during the spring months, and practised defence of the coast there.

He took great interest in the various new regulations for the canteen system, and pointed out the difficulty of having one contractor of groceries. He favoured the tenant system for the dry canteen, while keeping the wet canteen in the hands of the military.

During the autumn of 1896 he commanded a division at the New Forest autumn manœuvres.

He established a District Rifle Association at Gravesend, and himself gave two shields for annual competition: one for rifle shooting and one for carbine shooting. He evinced great interest in the town of Chatham and worked, in conjunction with the Mayor and Corporation, to ameliorate its condition for the benefit both of the soldiers and of the inhabitants.

On leaving the command in 1898 he was entertained at a public dinner given by the Mayor, and presented with a silver salver bearing an inscription, and with an address from which the following is an extract:—

‘We sincerely thank you for the valuable services you have rendered to our town; and whilst we much regret that we are losing from our midst the presence of one so distinguished as a scholar, scientist, and soldier, we rejoice that whilst here you greatly promoted cordial relations between the military and civic authorities, and took great interest in the moral and intellectual welfare of the inhabitants of Chatham.’

Warren was now on the shelf, and took a house at Ramsgate, where he resided until his services were again required by his country, and he was appointed to the command of the 5th Division and embarked with it for South Africa on 25th November 1899.

CHAPTER I

THE BEGINNING OF THE WAR

THE last year of the nineteenth century opened at a period of intense gloom for the British nation. The war in South Africa had found us, as most wars do, quite unprepared. The little force in Natal, under Sir George White, had been speedily surrounded by the mobile Boers, its line of communication had been cut, and it was itself shut up in an unfavourable position for defence at Ladysmith, and blockaded by a Boer force.

Large reinforcements were pouring into South Africa from England, and Sir Redvers Buller, who had arrived at Cape Town on 31st October to take supreme command, had gone to Natal. Here he made his first strategical mistake; and just as Sir George White, induced by political pressure, occupied positions in the extreme North of Natal, which he was not strong enough to hold, and had the consequences of

this departure from sound strategy burnt into him by the siege of Ladysmith, so Sir Redvers Buller, moved by clamours for the relief of Ladysmith and Kimberley, divided his force, sending part under Lord Methuen to relieve Kimberley, and himself taking the remainder to relieve Ladysmith, and learned a similar lesson.

Such inattention to the very elements of strategy might have speedily led to overwhelming disaster and to the triumph of the Boer States, and would undoubtedly have done so, had the Boers possessed a general worthy of the name. With what surprise and satisfaction would such a commander have observed the disposition of the British force in the North of Natal, with what rapidity would he have masked Sir George White's division, and, crossing the Tugela, seized the railway at its mouth, and, by the capture of Durban, have held Natal in the hollow of his hand ! But, although the generalship of the Boers was hopelessly timid, and they lost the opportunity of carrying all before them at the outset, and driving the British into the sea, the neglect of sound strategy on our side made itself seriously felt, and it was not until

Lord Roberts, at a later date, having collected and organised a large force, moved steadily on his objective—the capital of the Orange Free State—that either Kimberley or Ladysmith was relieved.

At the end of 1899 disaster after disaster had caused the public spirit at home to be much depressed, and men began to ask one another what was the reason. Was it the fault of our generals? or were the pluck and splendid bravery of our troops—so much in evidence—impotent, in these days of smokeless powder and quick-firing and long-range guns, against white men, equally well if not better armed, accustomed from their childhood to ride and shoot, stalk game, and avail themselves of cover, knowing the country and using every device to fight without endangering their own lives?

But to whatever depths the spirit of the nation sank at that terrible Christmas of 1899, however freely it was confessed that we had been too cocksure of success, had too much forgotten the God of battles, had despised our enemy, and arrogantly assumed that the war would be a walk-over; however much mothers

and sisters, widows and orphans, plunged into saddest mourning by the losses under Lord Methuen at Belmont, Eslin, the Modder River, and Majesfontein, under Major-General Gatacre at Stormberg, and under Sir Redvers Buller at Colenso, might bewail their loved ones who had died for their country on the battlefield, there was a most notable, a most wonderful, self-control among the people generally. Subdued by a distinct sense of disappointment and humiliation as one disaster after another occurred, there was no hesitation, no acceptance of defeat, but a dogged determination that the war, being a righteous war, must at any sacrifice be carried to a victorious conclusion. The national honour had been wounded by the impudent invasion of British dominions beyond the seas, and that wound could only be healed by the complete subjugation of the invader. The galling remembrance of the disasters of the previous Boer war—never retrieved—of the overbearing insolence and ingratitude which had rewarded the pusillanimous policy of so-called magnanimity, had formed amongst all classes a determination that there must be no more

Majuba treaties. Never again must a British defeat by Boers be allowed to conclude the matter, to rankle and fester in a way so difficult for a high-spirited people to bear, even when disguised under the name of magnanimity. Defeat must only mean renewed effort and determination to succeed. We were in the hands of God, but, so long as we could send out a man to fight, we were determined to go on, and, God willing, at whatever cost to end the matter, once for all, in such a way that our wounded honour should be healed, the susceptibilities of our invaded Colonies soothed, and the Boer taught to know his proper place, but as a member of a free and world-wide Empire and a subject of the Queen.

Such were the feelings of disappointment and sorrow, and yet of determination, by which the majority of people at home were animated when the last year of the nineteenth century commenced, and the successes of Major-General French at Colesberg, and of Colonel Pilcher at Douglas on New Year's Day, cheered despondent hearts, and inspired a hope that the luck was about to turn.

At this time Lord Roberts, who, after the disasters of the first half of December 1899, had been sent out to take supreme command, was, with Lord Kitchener, still on the high seas; Lord Methuen was holding a position at the Modder River, waiting for reinforcements before taking further action; Sir Redvers Buller, after the failure of the attack on Colenso on 15th December 1899, had withdrawn his whole force (two divisions) to Chieveley, there to mature his plans for a second advance. Time was passing, Sir George White was hardly pressed in Ladysmith by the investing Boers, and the 5th Division, commanded by Sir Charles Warren, had not yet arrived at the Cape. Three days after the battle of Colenso Sir Redvers Buller had sent orders to the Cape that this division was to be sent on to him at once, and he awaited its arrival before making his next move.

It was no wonder then that, in the state of public feeling at home at this time, the chief interest centred in the Natal Field Force, and great expectations were formed of what Sir Redvers Buller, whose reputation as a man of exceptional power and ability stood high in the

official world, would do when reinforced by the 5th Division under so capable a commander as Sir Charles Warren. This officer, as we have seen, had recently commanded the Thames District and had gained much experience in South African warfare twenty years previously, while some years later he was entrusted with the command of the Bechuanaland Expedition, and carried through the campaign so successfully that the Boers yielded all the main issues without fighting. When he was nominated to the command of the 5th Division in November every one rejoiced, wondering only that he had not been among the first generals to be sent out. When he landed with his division in Natal on the first day of the New Year, and by his seniority became second in command to Sir Redvers Buller, great hope was entertained that the combined wisdom of these two distinguished men would soon solve the difficulty of the relief of Ladysmith, and the operations immediately after his arrival were watched at home with hopeful if critical eyes.

WARREN CROSSES THE TUGELA

On the disembarkation of the 5th Division at Durban at the beginning of 1900 it at once entrained for Estcourt, where it arrived on 3rd January, adding to the strength of the Natal Field Force about 50 per cent. of both field artillery and infantry. Three days later Sir Charles Warren went to Frere to report to Sir Redvers Buller that his division was mobilised and ready to march.

Sir Redvers Buller had now decided to make another attempt to relieve Ladysmith, and this time he proposed to cross the Tugela higher up than Colenso, and force a way through the hills opposite Potgieter's Drift. Accordingly an army order was issued on 8th January directing the following moves to take place under the orders of Lieut.-General Sir C. F. Clery, K.C.B., on the night of the 9th to 10th January.

2ND DIVISION AND ATTACHED TROOPS

(a) Major-General Hildyard's Column

Mounted Brigade : 400 of all ranks (including one squadron 13th Hussars).

2nd Infantry Brigade.

Divisional Troops : a battery of Royal Field Artillery.

Corps Troops : 2 naval 12-pr. guns.

To move from Chieveley by the south of Doorn Kop to the camp already selected in the vicinity of Pretorius Farm.

(b) Major-General Hart's Column

Mounted Brigade : 400 of all ranks.

5th Infantry Brigade.

73rd Battery Royal Field Artillery.

17th Field Company Royal Engineers.

Corps Troops : 6 naval 12-pr. guns.

To move from Frere by the Frere-Springfield road to the camp selected south of Pretorius Farm.

(c) Headquarters and Divisional Troops

2nd Division

Mounted Brigade: Headquarters and main body Supply Column (from Frere), Medical unit.

Divisional Troops : a battery of Royal Field Artillery, Ammunition Column, Supply Column (from Frere), Field Hospital (from Frere).

Corps Troops : 2 squadrons 13th Hussars,

2 guns 66th Battery Royal Field Artillery, 2 naval 4·7-inch guns, Supply Column (from Frere).

To move from Chieveley (except where otherwise mentioned) by the Frere-Springfield road to the camp south of Pretorius Farm, except that one squadron 13th Hussars for the 5th Division and 2 guns 66th Battery Royal Field Artillery will be left at Frere.

5TH DIVISION AND ATTACHED TROOPS

The following troops will move on the evening of 10th January from Frere to Springfield, under the orders of the Lieutenant-General Sir C. Warren, G.C.M.G., K.C.B. :—

5th Division

4th Infantry Brigade.

11th Infantry Brigade.

Divisional Troops.

Corps Troops

10th Brigade.

Artillery—

61st Battery Royal Field Artillery
(Howitzer).

78th Battery Royal Field Artillery.

Ammunition Column.

Engineers—

Pontoon Troop.

Balloon Section.

Section Telegraph Division.

Supply Park.

On 9th January the following explanatory memorandum was issued from Frere Camp :—

1. The General proposes to effect the passage of the River Tugela, in the neighbourhood of Potgieter's Drift, with a view to the relief of Ladysmith.

2. Forces (already detailed) will be left at Chieveley and Frere to hold these points, while the remainder of the army is operating on the enemy's right flank.

3. Springfield will be seized and occupied, and the march of the main body and supplies to that point will be covered by a force encamped about Pretorius Farm.

4. With reference to Field Orders, dated 8th instant, paragraph 2 (a), the primary duty of Major-General Hildyard's column is to protect the march of the troops from Frere to Springfield during the formation of a supply depôt at Springfield, but he will also operate so as to induce the enemy to believe that our intention is to cross the River Tugela at Porrit's Drift.

5. As stated in paragraph 2 (b) and (c) of the Field Order above quoted, the remainder of Lieut.-General Clery's force will encamp south of Pretorius Farm. Major-General Hart will, under General Clery's orders,

assist in every way the supply columns as they pass his camp, and he will also be prepared to support Major-General Hildyard, if necessary.

6. On the afternoon of the 10th instant General Clery will send a sufficient force from the Mounted Brigade, with Artillery, to reconnoitre, and, if possible, occupy Springfield.

7. The force under General Warren's command (Field Order, dated 8th instant, paragraph 3) will reach Springfield on the morning of the 11th instant, in support of the mounted troops referred to in paragraph 6 of this order.

8. The General Commanding-in-Chief will proceed to Springfield on the 11th instant.

Between 10th and 13th January the whole Natal Field Force, except the 5th Brigade covering Colenso, was in motion from Chieveley, Frere, and Estcourt, concentrating on Springfield within five miles of Potgieter's Drift (Spearman's or Mount Alice). This position was seized by the cavalry on 11th January, on which day General Buller telegraphed home that he had occupied the south bank of the Tugela at Potgieter's Drift, and seized the pont, that the river was in flood, and the enemy strongly intrenched four and a half miles to the north.

The objective was the advance to Ladysmith

by forcing the passage of the Tugela at Potgieter's, and, with this in view, maps of the country about the drift were issued, with an account of the road from Potgieter's to Ladysmith. Upon reconnoitring the Boer positions on the hills in front of Potgieter's Sir Redvers Buller, however, came to the conclusion that they were too strong to be taken by direct attack, and on 14th January he directed Sir Charles Warren to reconnoitre Trichard's Drift, some six miles higher up the river to the westward, with a view to the possibility of crossing there and advancing to the west of Spion Kop and getting round to the north of that hill.

On 15th January the following secret orders were issued by Sir R. Buller to Sir C. Warren :—

1. The enemy's position in front of Potgieter's Drift seems to me to be too strong to be taken by direct attack.

2. I intend to try and turn it by sending a force across the Tugela from near Trichard's Drift, and up to the west of Spion Kop.

3. You will have command of that force, which will consist of the 11th Brigade of your Division, your Brigade Division, Royal Field Artillery, and General Clery's Division complete, and all the mounted troops except 400.

4. You will of course act as circumstances require, but my idea is that you should continue throughout, refusing your right and throwing your left forward till you gain the open plain north of Spion Kop. Once there you will command the rear of the position facing Potgieter's Drift, and I think render it untenable.

5. At Potgieter's there will be the 4th Brigade, part of the 10th Brigade, one battery Royal Field Artillery, one howitzer battery, two 4.7-inch naval guns. With them I shall threaten both the positions in front of us, and also attempt a crossing at Skiet's Drift, so as to hold the enemy off you as much as possible.

6. It is very difficult to ascertain the numbers of the enemy with any sort of exactness. I do not think there can be more than 400 on your left, and I estimate the total force that will be opposed to us at about 7,000. I think they have only one or at the most two big guns.

7. You will take two and a half days' supply in your regimental transport, and a supply column holding one day more. This will give you four days' supply, which should be enough. Every extra wagon is a great impediment.

8. I gathered that you did not want an ammunition column. I think myself that I should be inclined to take one column for the two Brigade Divisions. You may find a position on which it is expedient to expend a great deal of ammunition.

9. You will issue such orders to the Pontoon Troop as you think expedient. If possible, I should like it to come here after you have crossed. I do not think you

will find it possible to let oxen draw the wagons over the pontoons. It will be better to draw them over by horses or mules, swimming the oxen ; the risk of breaking the pontoons, if oxen crossed them, is too great.

10. The man whom I am sending you as a guide is a Devonshire man : he was employed as a boy on one of my own farms ; he is English to the backbone, and can be thoroughly trusted. He thinks that if you cross Springfield flat at night he can take you the rest of the way to the Tugela by a road that cannot be overlooked by the enemy, but you will doubtless have the road reconnoitred.

11. I shall endeavour to keep up heliographic communication with you from a post on the hill directly in your rear.

12. I wish you to start as soon as you can. Supply is all in, and General Clery’s Division will, I hope, concentrate at Springfield to-day. Directly you start I shall commence to cross the river.

13. Please send me the 10th Brigade, except that portion which you detail for the garrison at Springfield, as soon as possible ; also the eight 12-pr. naval guns, and any details, such as ammunition column, &c., that you do not wish to take.

On the same day Sir Redvers Buller issued a spirited appeal to the troops in which he said ‘ We are going to the relief of our comrades in Ladysmith ; there will be no turning back.’ Great was the rejoicing of the men, and Sir Redvers

was greeted with cheers wherever he showed himself and shouts of 'No turning back this time.'

Sir Charles Warren's force was in fact a flying column consisting of 1,500 mounted troops, 12,000 infantry, and 36 field guns, carrying with it three and a half days' provisions. The wagons, guns, and wheeled vehicles of this force (leaving all tents, camp equipage, and stores behind) formed a column fifteen miles in length.

The whole of the long-range guns, the howitzer battery, the mountain battery, and two brigades of infantry (8,000 men) remained with Sir Redvers Buller at Potgieter's.

The force thus placed under Sir Charles Warren's command was hastily put together, and he could not even see them all before they started. The 5th Division had but recently arrived—some of the battalions having just landed from a long sea voyage—had been hurriedly mobilised, and was not acclimatised to the heat of Natal in midsummer. The 2nd Division had only just arrived from Chieveley and was unknown to General Warren until he met it on the line of march on 16th January,

while the mounted troops he only saw in detail, as they did not join his command until the 17th of the month. No extra Staff was allotted to the force as a whole, and upon the Staff of the 5th Division were thrown the additional staff duties of the flying column, for no regimental officers were available, all being required with their units.

Sir Charles Warren was ordered to move as soon as supplies were all in and the 10th Brigade had removed from Springfield Bridge to Spearman's Hill. He tells us in his despatch that he made his arrangements for getting supplies on 15th January, moved the 10th Brigade on the following day, and on the evening of that day left Springfield with a force under his command which amounted to an army corps (less one brigade), and by a night march arrived at Trichard's Drift, and took possession of the hills on the south side of the Tugela river.

The officers detailed for intelligence were as yet all with Sir Redvers Buller, and therefore Sir Charles Warren, once he started, had to rely for local information entirely on the mounted troops not yet under his command. They had

had only a short march, while the infantry marching from Springfield had had a very long day's march. The cavalry should therefore have been able to carry out some reconnaissances, but no information could be obtained from them during the night. On the 17th they came under Sir Charles Warren's command, and soon after reported that Wright's farm was occupied by Boers. At dawn on the 17th Warren commenced throwing his pontoons across the Tugela at Trichard's Drift; but the infantry, crossing by punts, first Major-General Woodgate's brigade and then Major-General Hart's, got across. Sir Redvers Buller was himself present in the middle of the day and addressed Major-General Woodgate's brigade, giving also directions to that officer as to his attack. The mounted troops passed over principally by the drift, and went over the country as far as Acton Homes. By evening Major-Generals Woodgate and Hart had their brigades with a battery of artillery lining the crests of the foothills facing Spion Kop.

The crossing of the fifteen miles of wagons could not be carried out under thirty-six hours,

and occupied the night of the 17th and the whole of 18th January. While this operation was in progress it was necessary to employ one brigade to protect the convoy to the south to prevent an incursion of Boers from Middle Drift, and two brigades to the front. A demonstration was also made by Major-General Lyttelton at Potgieter's. By the evening of the 18th the passage of the river was successfully accomplished by the whole force with all its impedimenta.

The wagons, however, could not be kept in the hole where the crossing was effected, and orders were given that they should march on the following morning to Venter's Laager, before the attack on the Rangeworthy hills was commenced. In the meantime the question of attacking the Boer positions in front of them was considered by Major-Generals Woodgate and Hart, who reported that it was too hazardous in the daytime.

During the afternoon of the 18th intelligence was received that a detachment of our mounted troops had had a successful engagement with a party of Boers at Acton Homes and that

support was required. Sir Charles Warren sent on the whole of his remaining cavalry (300), and Major-General Hildyard's brigade was ordered to march early the following morning. The engagement resulted in the capture of thirty-one Boers.

Sir Redvers Buller telegraphed to the Secretary of State for War on the 18th from Spearman's Hill :

‘ A battery of field artillery, howitzer battery, and Lyttelton's brigade are across the Tugela River at Potgieter's Drift. The enemy's position is being bombarded by us. Five miles higher up Warren has crossed the river by a pontoon bridge, eighty-five yards long, and hopes that his force will, by this evening, have advanced five miles from the river. To his right front the enemy are busily intrenching.’

CHAPTER II

POSITION OF AFFAIRS

LEAVING Sir Charles Warren on the north side of the Tugela in advance of Trichard's Drift and Sir Redvers Buller at Spearman's Hill, with Major-General Lyttelton at Potgieter's, let us pause to consider the general position of affairs. In order to understand it we must know the features of the country between the Tugela and Ladysmith, the relief of which was the object of the operations; the numbers of the forces employed on each side; the positions occupied by the enemy, and the ways in which they could best be attacked.

We cannot do better, in the first instance, than quote from Sir Charles Warren himself as to the country between the Tugela and Ladysmith and the strategy adopted. The extract is from a contribution last autumn to the 'National Review' entitled 'Lessons from the South African War.'

‘If the Colonial farm map¹ is examined it will be seen that immediately south of Ladysmith is the rugged country of Grobelaars Kloof, extending to the Tugela and Colenso, some twelve miles from Ladysmith, and that the only practicable directions of advance within easy access of the rail-head at Frere were that to the right, following the line of railway to Pieters through very rugged mountains, and that to the left, by Potgieter’s and Skiet’s Drifts, through comparatively open country, with a fairly good wagon road of sixteen miles from Frere to Potgieter’s Drift, and a good wagon road of fourteen miles into Ladysmith over open country, the only hills to be met with being those commanding Potgieter’s Drift from the south, and Lancers Hill, held by the Boers investing Ladysmith and six miles from that city. This open country is, however, commanded on the south by the Doorn Kloof range resting on the Tugela.

‘It was the left-hand advance that was chosen, but, though the Boer lines on the north side of the Tugela about Potgieter’s Drift and Vaalkrantz were commanded by the high ground of Mount

¹ See reproduction.

Alice and Zwart Kop, 1,000 feet above the Tugela, the attack was not at once made upon their position. Again, there was a choice of making a *détour*, either to the right by Doorn Kloof, or to the left over the Spion Kop range and its adjuncts.

‘So far as the map will indicate there is much in favour of an advance by Doorn Kloof, particularly because its possession seemed to be a necessity to cover the advance over the open country between Potgieter’s Drift and Lancers Hill.

‘On the left is the Spion Kop range, stretching ten miles north from the Tugela and separating the open country about Acton Homes from the open country about Potgieter’s. This range is 1,000 to 1,500 feet above the Tugela, and behind it lay the principal camps of the Boer army. The result of taking the left-hand route would very much increase the distance for wagons into Ladysmith.

From Potgieter’s Drift to Lancers Hill, 8 miles.

“	“	“	past Fair View to Lancers Hill,
			24 miles
“	“	“	past Acton Homes to Lancers
			Hill, 35 miles.

Moreover, Acton Homes was on the line of communication of the Orange Free State Boers with some of their mountain passes, and they kept a large force in the hills above to secure their retreat.'


As to the strength of the Boer force opposed to the British on the Tugela there is the greatest difference of opinion. Sir Redvers Buller has put it at some 7,000 men, a Boer writer says it was little over half that number, while Sir Charles Warren thinks it was much greater than 7,000. It is generally agreed that the British Intelligence Office rightly estimated the combined forces of the enemy at about 60,000, increased probably by foreigners and rebels to 80,000, and that about half of that number were in Natal. If, then, a very liberal allowance be made for the numbers required to guard the lines of communication to the Orange Free State and the Transvaal, to carry on the investment of Ladysmith, to patrol and reconnoitre the country, a very large force would still be available for watching the British Brigade at Chieveley and opposing the British forces at Potgieter's and Trichard's Drifts; and whatever the number may

have been on the Tugela the Boers were all mounted and acting on interior lines, and could easily and rapidly concentrate a large force in any direction on the Tugela front.

It is not unreasonable to suppose that during the month which had elapsed since the battle of Colenso the Boers had largely increased their forces on the Tugela, and we know that they had been busy preparing long lines of intrenchment in favourable positions right away beyond Acton Homes to the positions defending the roads leading to the passes to the Orange Free State. All round the Acton Homes basin the hills had been fortified, pom-poms and guns were in position along the western slopes of the Rangeworthy hills, and guns and rifles on the road to the Harrismith Pass. The Boers were quite prepared all along the line, and, although they were uncertain where the British were going to cross the river and strike, and were so badly commanded that they allowed the crossings to be made without serious resistance, they were quite ready with camps in sheltered positions, with retired 'schanzes' on the hills, with outposts on the slopes to the river, to concentrate a large front

in any direction from which they might be attacked.

Mr. Winston Spencer Churchill, in his 'London to Ladysmith viâ Pretoria,' thus describes the position in front of Sir Redvers Buller and Sir Charles Warren:—

'When Buller had arrived at Potgieter's he found himself confronted by a horseshoe position of great strength, enclosing and closing the debouches from the ford where he had secured a practical bridgehead. He therefore masked Potgieter's with seven battalions and twenty-four guns, and sent Warren with twelve battalions and thirty-six guns to turn the right, which rested on the lofty hill—almost mountain—of Spion Kop. The Boers, to meet this turning movement, extended their line westwards along the heights of the Tugela valley almost as far as Acton Homes. Their whole position was therefore shaped like a note of interrogation laid on its side, —, the curve in front of General Lyttelton, the straight line before Sir Charles Warren. At the angle formed by the junction of the curve and the line stands Spion Kop—"Look-out Hill." The straight position in front

of Sir Charles Warren ran in two lines along the edge and crest of a plateau which rises steeply two miles from the river, but is approachable by numerous long arêtes and dongas.'

Let us now consider what were the operations Sir Redvers Buller proposed to execute. The instructions ¹ he issued to Sir Charles Warren are necessarily the official record of what was in his mind at the time. But they are vague where they should be definite, and definite where they should be elastic. They tell Sir Charles Warren that, finding the Boers in front of Potgieter's too strongly posted to allow of a direct attack upon their positions, his chief has decided to send him with the larger part of the army to turn their flank by crossing the Tugela near Trichard's Drift and 'moving up to the west of Spion Kop.'

But what the west of Spion Kop meant, whether the road by Acton Homes, or that by Fair View and Groote Hoek or Rosalie, the former twice as long as the latter, is not explained and it is impossible to gather from these instructions. Lord Roberts, in his despatch, though

¹ See pages 67 to 69.

evidently in some perplexity, seems to think it meant the Acton Homes road.

Next Sir Charles Warren was instructed to act as circumstances require, but he was to continue to refuse his right and throw his left forward till he gained the open plain north of Spion Kop, where he was told he would command the rear of the position facing Potgieter's Drift, which he would be able to render untenable. While Sir Charles Warren was so employed, Sir Redvers Buller undertook to threaten both of the positions in front of Potgieter's and also to attempt a crossing at Skiet's Drift, so as to hold the enemy off Sir Charles Warren as much as possible.

But the turning force of 12,000 men had fifteen miles of wagons accompanying it, and was to take with it only four days' provisions, which, of course, could be filled up by Sir Redvers Buller so long as it was in road communication with him; but, as soon as this was broken, Sir Charles Warren's operations were limited to what he could do in four days. And that Sir Redvers Buller intended the road communication to be broken is shown by his request in the instructions

that as soon as Sir Charles Warren had made the passage of the river he should, if possible, send the pontoons to him. Finally, Sir Charles Warren was directed by these instructions to send the eight naval 12-pr. guns to Sir Redvers Buller, a step which had a very important bearing upon the final issue of the undertaking.

The success of Sir Charles Warren, therefore, depended upon his being able to accomplish his flanking movement in four days from the time of leaving his temporary base, upon his having no necessity for long-range guns, and upon the right flank of the Boers, which he was to turn, being within easy reach.

It is, however, well to read the views of others on the spot of the intentions of Sir Redvers Buller.

Thus Bishop Baynes of Natal, in 'My Diocese during the War,' gives some information on the subject, which was obtained at first hand from Major-General Lyttelton. On pages 180 and 181 he says :

'Tuesday, Jan. 16th.—I went up the hill after breakfast: when I came back to lunch I found the camp in a stir. At last the orders had

come to move, and the plan of campaign was declared, and General Lyttelton explained it to me. Our brigade is to move off about 2.30 to the river, and two battalions are to cross Potgieter's Drift to-night and the rest to-morrow. To-morrow our big guns will open on the Boers and we shall make a big demonstration. Meanwhile Sir Charles Warren, with his other brigade (General Woodgate's), and with General Clery's Division (consisting of General Hildyard's and General Hart's brigades), is to move away to a point five or six miles higher up the river, cross there, and approach the flank of the Boer position up the slopes of Spion Kop. The hope is that the Boers will not be able to spare men enough from here (besides Colenso and Ladysmith) to offer effective opposition to Sir Charles Warren, or, if they do, then we may get through their defences here. General Lyttelton called the colonels of his battalions together and explained the plan to them.'

Mr. J. B. Atkins, in his 'Relief of Ladysmith,' writes :

'On Friday, January 19, I crossed Waggon Drift and rode some five miles further to the

advanced position of Sir Charles Warren, who was now marching west. Obviously the plan was this : Warren was to make a long march round and attack the Boer hills in the rear, and the force remaining at Potgieter's Drift would simultaneously attack them in front. Warren's troops were, in a word, to become a detached force ; they would disappear round the stretching hills, and when we heard them banging away behind Spion Kop, we, who stayed behind, would have our signal to advance.'

Mr. Bennet Burleigh, in 'The Natal Campaign,' says :

' Whilst this demonstration was proceeding near Potgieter's, Sir Charles Warren, with his guns and part of Clery's division, advanced towards a drift near Trieghardt's Farm, commonly so called, six miles west of Mount Alice.¹ It was upon the direct Acton Homes road and led to the rough ground, foothills, and detached ranges behind, on the west of Spion Kop. The possession of these, it was trusted, would drive the Boers from the vicinity of Potgieter's, and Spion Kop must fall into our hands.'

¹ Potgieter's Drift.

It is now understood that Sir Redvers Buller intended Sir Charles Warren to advance by the Fair View and Groote Hoek or Rosalie road, because he says in the memorandum 'not necessarily for publication,' just published: 'From the first there could be no question but that the only practicable road for his column was the one by Fair View. The problem was to get rid of the enemy who were holding it.' And it seems more likely he would call the Fair View road that from Fair View to Groote Hoek than that to Acton Homes, which he would probably call the Acton Homes road. And, indeed, there is this corroboration—that the troops were furnished with a list of the wells of water on the road from Trichard's Drift to Groote Hoek, or Rosalie, by Fair View Farm. The length of the road from Fair View to a point near Groote Hoek is nine miles, and the length of the road to the same point by way of Acton Homes is twenty miles, more than double the length. Yet Lord Roberts had both Buller's memorandum and also his secret instructions to Warren before him when he wrote in his covering despatch :

‘The plan of operations is not very clearly described in the despatches themselves, but it may be gathered from them and the accompanying documents that the original intention was to cross the Tugela at or near ‘Trichard’s Drift, and thence, by following the road past Fair View and Acton Homes, to gain the open plain north of Spion Kop, the Boer position in front of Potgieter’s Drift being too strong to be taken by direct attack.’

The truth is that the information possessed as to the country was extremely small. No general description of it was available. There were no road reports, no reconnaissances—in fact, it was to all intents and purposes ‘an unknown country.’ From the high ground on the south side of the Tugela the hills to the north could be scanned, and it could be seen that to the west of Spion Kop the Rangeworthy hills appeared to terminate abruptly in the Bastion or Sugar Loaf Hill. Here it was supposed that the Boer trenches ended and were held by only a small force. It was this range that Sir Charles Warren was directed to attack, by pivoting the right of his line on Spion Kop and swinging

round his left until he gained the so-called open country to the north of Spion Kop.

Beyond, towards Acton Homes, other hills could be seen, but nothing was known about them. It was generally supposed that the ground was good for cavalry for a certain distance; but the information given was that the Acton Homes road, leading through Clydesdale, passed through a country full of dongas and small kopjes, and passed eight or nine miles north of Potgieter's. The open country immediately north of Spion Kop could only be reached by wagons by the road leading past Fair View to Groote Hoek. The farm map, procured from the office of the Surveyor-General of Natal and available for the troops, gave a fairly good idea of the ground about Spion Kop; but it was uncertain how far it could be relied upon. It showed that mountain ranges beyond Spion Kop extended to the west, range after range, with a large hill both to the north and north-east of Acton Homes, the high road from Acton Homes to Ladysmith passing up a valley between high hills. It was also evident, from the lines taken by the rivers and streams, that the

water-parting continues from Spion Kop several miles to the north-east of Acton Homes.

The Orange Free State Boers encamped on the Tugela drew their supplies from Harrismith. Their communications were by two roads leading through the Drakensberg mountains to the south of Van Reenan's pass, the more southerly passing Oliver's Hoek. These two roads meet at Acton Homes. Acton Homes, which lies in a basin, is surrounded on three sides by hills, and these hills formed an important strategic position. On the north and north-east they guarded the investing lines of Ladysmith, and on the north-west and west the communications of the Orange Free State Boers with their base. It was not difficult to believe that these hills were covered with intrenchments strongly held, or able at short notice to be strongly held.

In regard both to the positions held by the Boers and the numbers of the enemy there was a good deal of information which must have been at the disposal of Sir Charles Warren ; but the difficulty would no doubt have been to know how much of it was reliable.

It seems to have been certainly known that,

since the troops had marched westwards to Potgieter's on 10th January, large bodies of Boers had been moving up the river from the neighbourhood of Colenso, and massing behind Spion Kop and Acton Homes, and that near the latter place there was a large Boer camp which supplied the camp behind Spion Kop with provisions.

It was also understood that the Orange Free State Boers were posted along the right of the line as far as Spion Kop, and that thence the Transvaal Boers were extended to the left or eastward; that, in the vicinity of Spion Kop and Groote Hoek, there were five or six large camps, their position being very central, as from that point the Boers could easily go in an hour either west to Acton Homes on the one side, or east to Doorn Kloof on the other.

Thus, in whatever direction our troops marched along the Boer lines, they were always confronted by a large body of Boers.

A trench had been cut along the Boer lines behind Potgieter's Drift as far west as Spion Kop, with a number of men always in it so long as the main body of the British force faced

them. On Spion Kop itself, on the east side, were four guns, which, it was said, would rake Trichard's Drift at long ranges, while to the west of Spion Kop, on the Rangeworthy hills, an intrenchment had been made and was held by the enemy, who could be readily reinforced should the British cross the drift.

It must not, however, be supposed that Boers can fight only behind prepared trenches. They are experts at quickly raising up 'schanzes,' which they make in a few minutes, and they only construct regular trenches when they have considerable time at their disposal, or when there is no natural material lying handy on the ground. On Spion Kop, and to the west over the Rangeworthy hills and beyond, the Boers did not require trenches to make an effectual resistance. There was plenty of material to enable them to hold the crests of the hills against a far superior force; but they preferred to make their position almost impregnable by selecting continuous grassy slopes, over which an advance would be impracticable in daylight. From such positions nothing but artillery fire could drive them out.

CHAPTER III

ADVANCE TO VENTER'S LAAGER AND ATTACK OF THE
RANGEWORTHY HILLS

At the end of Chapter II we left Sir Charles Warren across the Tugela with all his force, including his wagons, on the night of 18th January and ready to march to Venter's Laager on the following morning.

As the wagons marched on the morning of the 19th in four or five parallel columns, in length about three miles or so, the brigades commanded by Major-Generals Hart and Woodgate also kept pace with them until opposite Fair View, where the right of the line was to rest in the attack of the Rangeworthy hills. The two brigades then occupied the slopes of the adjoining hills. This march was a very remarkable one, and it is to be doubted whether there is another instance on record of such a force, forming a length of three or four miles, with

wagons four or five deep on the column's reverse flank, being successfully led by a flank march right along the face of commanding hills held by an enemy strongly intrenched and provided with long-range guns, on a road just out of range of effective rifle fire, and with a rapid river on its reverse flank. It was in accordance with the instructions, but it was a most hazardous proceeding, and it was owing to the careful management of Sir Charles Warren, as well as the want of initiative or military instinct on the part of the Boer commander, that there was no disaster.

General Warren had reconnoitred the Fair View-Groote Hoek road, and found that it led within effective rifle range round the west flank of Spion Kop, and was therefore an undesirable road so long as Spion Kop was held by the enemy. He then crossed the Venter's Spruit, near Venter's Laager, and examined the other road by Acton Homes. He ascertained that it led through a strongly defended pass at the water-parting, and that on both sides it was held by the Boers, while it was twice the length of the first road. The length was the great

defect. There was only one road leading to it, and the wagons could only go singly. The force could not possibly watch a front of fifteen miles occupied by the enemy. The result would be that each day's march must be limited by the length of road that could be watched. The force was to be provisioned for only four days, and, even if everything went successfully, it would take three days to get from Venter's Spruit by Acton Homes to the point near Groote Hoek. It was therefore evident that the road could not be used, even if it were not so strongly held by the enemy.

In the evening Sir Charles Warren assembled his General and Staff Officers and the Officers Commanding Royal Artillery and Royal Engineers, and pointed out to them that there were only two roads by which the wheeled transport and guns could proceed: (1) by Acton Homes, and (2) north of Fair View by Rosalie or Groote Hoek. He informed them that he rejected the Acton Homes road because time would not allow of it, and his subordinate commanders concurred unanimously. He then pointed out that the only possible way of all getting through by the

road north of Fair View would be by taking three or four days' food in their haversacks and sending all their wagons back across the Tugela ; but before this could be done the position in front of them must be captured.

Although Sir Redvers Buller does not mention in his despatches what information he possessed, either as to the routes to Ladysmith or as to the measures taken by the Boers to prevent them to him, he quotes incidentally, and in quite a different connection, the following message which Sir Charles Warren telegraphed to him the same evening :

‘ (Sent 7.54 P.M., received 8.15 P.M.) Left flank, 19th January.

‘ To the Chief of the Staff

‘ I find there are only two roads by which we could possibly get from Trichard's Drift to Potgieter's, on the north of the Tugela—one by Acton Homes, the other by Fair View and Rosalie ; the first I reject as too long, the second is a very difficult road for a large number of wagons, unless the enemy is thoroughly cleared out. I am therefore going to adopt some special arrangements which will involve my stay at

Venter's Laager for two or three days. I will send in for further supplies and report progress.

‘C. WARREN.’

This is not the sort of message he would have sent if he had been ordered to take the Acton Homes-Ladysmith road, and it shows unquestionably that, as to the roads and the country, very little was known.

The reply to the message was that three days' supply was being sent.

It has been supposed by some writers on the subject—and the popular notion at the time certainly was that the mountainous country suddenly ended at the western slopes of the Rangeworthy hills to the west of Spion Kop—that Acton Homes was situated on a level plain, and that Sir Charles Warren had only to march round by Acton Homes, keeping the Rangeworthy hills and Spion Kop at a respectful distance, and he would be able with little delay to take the lines opposing Potgieter's Drift in reverse. It does not appear whether Sir Redvers Buller entertained this idea; if he did, he gave no definite instructions, apparently, in that

sense to Sir Charles Warren; but if he did not, then he must have supposed that the Boer right flank rested on the Rangeworthy hills and could be turned, and was unaware that it extended to Acton Homes and the roads to the Orange Free State. We can hardly suppose that when he wrote of sending Sir Charles Warren to turn the Boer flank he expected Sir Charles Warren to accomplish on the Rangeworthy hills, with 12,000 men and no long-range guns, what he himself had been unwilling to attempt a week before at Potgieter's Drift with 20,000 men and long-range guns. If he did, he was sending him on a hazardous undertaking, and yet this was what opening the Fair View and Rosalie road practically meant—an attack on the centre of the Boer position.

We have already alluded to the prejudice created against Sir Charles Warren by the unfortunate suggestion that while Sir Redvers Buller desired him to go by the Acton Homes road, he preferred the nearer road to Groote Hoek and Rosalie. It is now clear that, if Lord Roberts had not alluded to Acton Homes in this connection, the idea would never have entered

any one's head, because such a route in the circumstances was impossible. It might have been the conception of a military genius to have thought that the best way of relieving Ladysmith would be to strike at the communications of the Orange Free State Boers on the Harri-smith and other roads ; but this we need not consider, as it certainly did not suggest itself to Sir Redvers Buller. Had Sir Charles Warren's force been composed mainly of well-trained mounted troops, and had the country been less hilly, possibly the aspect of affairs would have been changed, and he might have made a real wide turning movement ; but he had hardly any mounted troops, and the country was very hilly. He was, in fact, told to do an impossible thing—to turn a flank at a point where there was no flank to turn. As Mr. J. B. Atkins observes in his 'Relief of Ladysmith' : 'It had been discovered that after all there was no way round to the back of Spion Kop through open country. The hills in which the Boers were are, in fact, a spur of the Drakensberg mountains : wherever Sir Charles Warren might go, he must go through mountains.

Sir Charles Warren was not consulted as to the plan of operations, or as to the supplies, or impedimenta to accompany him, and it was generally understood that on his arrival at Frere he had advocated the attack of the Boers intrenched on the south of the Tugela at Colenso, and proceeding on the lines which were eventually successful. But, if the suggestion was made, it was not approved. Instead, Sir Redvers Buller proposed to break through the Boer line at Potgieter's, just as he had tried to do at Colenso. On 11th January his force, assembled at Potgieter's, was stronger by two brigades of infantry and a brigade division of artillery than it was at Colenso, and yet he hesitated, after the experience of Colenso, to attack the Boer positions. Nevertheless, he seems to have expected to be able to relieve Ladysmith by sending Sir Charles Warren with 12,000 men and thirty-six field guns to attack the Boer position in the Range-worthy hills west of Spion Kop, while he held a certain number of Boers in front of him by making a demonstration at Potgieter's.

With the map before us there is but one solution to Sir Redvers Buller's directions. He

assumed that the Boer right rested in the vicinity of Bastion Hill, a spur of the Rangeworthy hills, and he wished Sir Charles Warren, pivoting on Spion Kop, to sweep round his left to overlap that position.

Sir Charles was given no long-range guns with which to reply to those of the Boers. He had to deal with an enemy already confident with the victory gained at Colenso, and he was doomed to failure if he attempted to advance before he had demoralised the enemy by a continuous and effective artillery fire.

Had Sir Charles Warren been so ill-advised as to try to advance by the Acton Homes road to Ladysmith, it is not difficult to prophesy what would most probably have occurred. The Boers had strongly fortified the hills all round the Acton Homes basin, pom-poms and guns were in position along the western slopes of the Rangeworthy hills, and guns and rifles on the road to the Harrismith pass. Any force attempting to proceed by that route would no doubt have been allowed by the Boers to enter the basin, and then would have been cut off from Trichard's Drift by the closing of the road below

Bastion Hill. The column, thus hemmed in and caught in a trap, would have been compelled either to fight its way down to the Middle Drift or to surrender. In either case Natal would have been at the mercy of the Boers.

ATTACK OF THE RANGEWORTHY HILLS

Sir Charles Warren had assured himself by his reconnoissance that no wide outflanking movement was possible, and he had come to the conclusion that the only way to carry out his instructions was to capture the positions in front of him, creeping up the dongas and long arêtes, alluded to by Mr. Winston Spencer Churchill, and getting his artillery to work so as to bring an effective fire on the Boer trenches, and, after a complete artillery preparation, to make an infantry attack—certainly in the first instance a frontal attack, because it always must be a frontal attack when an enemy defending a position and acting on interior lines is more mobile than the attacking force—to break through the Boer lines, rolling them up from each flank, and, having cleared the front, and opened the road from Fair View to Rosalie, to

send the wagons back, and, with supplies for four days in the haversacks, to march round Spion Kop to the appointed position. These were the 'special arrangements' to which he referred in his telegram to the Chief of the Staff on 19th January.

Looking at matters as we now know them, it seems a foolhardy proceeding to send a general with 12,000 infantry and guns inferior in range to those of the enemy to attack a large force strongly intrenched on commanding positions, flanked by infantry fire and long-range guns, and at the same time to issue an order that there must be no turning back.

Sir Charles Warren believed that by adopting a plan which he employed later successfully at Pieters—a continuous fire of artillery for some days in order to demoralise the enemy, and an attack with a long line, with very weak supports, because the Boers have none, every man being in the fighting line—he might be successful. At Pieters the artillery fire on the Boer lines was continuous from 22nd to 27th February—that is, five or six days—and with as long a period of artillery fire on the Rangeworthy hills, it is

probable that the Boers would have retired, as it is known they were getting demoralised on 23rd January and had begun to move their wagons to the west.

Sir Charles Warren lost no time after his reconnaissances in making his dispositions for attack, and issued the following instructions to Lieut.-General Sir C. F. Clery dated 19th January :

‘ General Officer Commanding 2nd Division

‘ I shall be glad if you will arrange to clear the Boers out of the ground above that at present occupied by the 11th Brigade, by a series of out-flanking movements. In the early morning an advance should be made as far as the Hussars reconnoitred to-day, and a shelter-trench there made across the slope of the hill. A portion of the slopes of the adjoining hill to the west can then be occupied, the Artillery assisting, if necessary, in clearing the western side and upper slopes. When this is done I think that a battery can be placed on the slopes of the western hill in such a position that it could shell the schanzes of the Boers on Spion Kop and the upper portion

of the eastern hill. When this is done a further advance can be made on the eastern hill, and artillery can be brought to bear upon the upper slopes of the western hill. It appears to me that this might be done with comparatively little loss of life, as the Boers can in each turn be outflanked. The following Cavalry are at your disposal: two squadrons Royal Dragoons and 5th Divisional Squadron.'

General Clery accordingly moved at 3 A.M. on 20th January with a force of four batteries Royal Field Artillery and the 5th and 11th Brigades of Infantry to occupy the heights to the west and north-west of Spion Kop. The eastern spur¹ was occupied with two battalions of the 11th Brigade, and the spur immediately to the west of the latter with the two remaining battalions of the 11th Brigade. On occupying these heights Lieut.-General Clery found himself in front of a semi-circular range of heights completely overlooking the heights he had arrived on. The left of this high ridge almost rested on Spion Kop, while the right extended to the spur overlooking Fair View Farm. The road which would have to be used

¹ Called Three Tree Hill.

for wagons in the advance passed on the left of this position, but the enemy's position was very strong, with a glacis reaching down to the heights occupied by Lieut.-General Clery. The ground on the other flank (left) afforded a good deal more cover for advance, and Lieut.-General Clery hoped, if he succeeded in occupying that flank of the ridge, to swing round to the right and take the remainder of the enemy's position in flank. He therefore moved up the artillery to the eastern spur and moved the 5th Brigade to reinforce the two battalions of the 11th Brigade already on the western spur, placing the whole of this latter force under Major-General Hart, and directing him to move forward against the left flank of the enemy's position. This was done, and a series of kopjes was occupied in succession, which brought the force that evening within reach of storming the enemy's position.

In a despatch dated 20th January 1900 Sir Charles Warren says :

‘ After successfully carrying some of the hills General Clery reported that he had now reached a point which it would be necessary to take by frontal attack, which he did not think would be

desirable. To this I replied: "I quite concur that a frontal attack is undesirable, and that a flank attack is more suitable. I intended to convey that we should hold what we get by means of intrenchments when necessary, and not retire, continuing the advance to-morrow if it cannot be done to-night; frontal attack, with heavy losses, is simply playing the Boer game." On the same day Sir Redvers Buller telegraphed to the Secretary of State for War:

'General Clery with part of Warren's force has been in action from 6 A.M. till 7 P.M. to-day. By judicious use of his artillery he has fought his way up, capturing ridge after ridge, for about three miles. Troops are now bivouacking on the ground he has gained, but main position is still in front of them.'

Bishop Baynes of Natal, in 'My Diocese during the War,' writes: '*Saturday, January 20th.*—The fighting is continuous, but the real battle is on the other side of the hill, where Sir Charles Warren is swinging his line round. His right wing, which is only some five miles from us over the ridge of Spion Kop, is the pivot, and while that remains more or less stationary, a long line

is gradually swinging round to his left, so bringing the Boers into a V.'

On 20th January 'the cavalry on the extreme left, under Lord Dundonald, demonstrated effectively,' says Mr. Winston S. Churchill, 'and the South African Light Horse, under Colonel Byng, actually took and held, without artillery support of any kind, a high hill (Sugarloaf Hill), called henceforward Bastion Hill, between the Dutch right and centre.'

Mr. Bennet Burleigh says: 'Warren prosecuted his turning movement, sending his right and centre well in, whilst Hildyard on the left with Hart's Brigade moved forward. Clearly the object in view was to seize Bastion Hill, as we have dubbed it from its shape, and roll up the Boer right towards Spion Kop over the direct Ladysmith road viâ Potgieter's. . . . Still, it was with his left that he pushed hardest with Hildyard's and Hart's Brigades — the latter thrown further forward.'

On 21st January it was found that the enemy had evacuated the position during the night, and it was occupied by Major-General Hart's Brigade in the morning. Two battalions

had been detached from the 2nd Brigade on the previous evening to assist the troops on the heights, and were directed to co-operate with Major-General Hart by attacking the enemy's right flank. When the enemy's position of the previous day had been thus occupied it was discovered that the enemy had fallen back to a second strong position in near, the advance to which was over open ground and entailed a frontal attack.

Sir Redvers Buller, who went over to see Sir Charles Warren on the 21st, warned him that the enemy had received large reinforcements, some 2,500 men, to strengthen their right flank, and ordered two batteries to move from the hill on the right to ground on the left, where they came into action against the enemy's right flank. A fire was kept up all day, but it was not considered advisable to make a frontal attack on his position.

It is only reasonable to suppose that Sir Charles Warren explained verbally to Sir Redvers Buller, on this first occasion of meeting him since his reconnaissance, what his plans were—i.e. the 'special arrangements' he had alluded to in his telegram of 19th January—

the continual bombardment, the advance on both sides of an arête, and the alternate turning of the Boer position on the right hand and on the left, with the ultimate intention, when the position was gained, of sending the wagons back and^d advancing in light order with provisions carried in the haversack.

Sir Charles Warren, on 21st January, asked to be supplied with another infantry brigade to extend his line to the left, with howitzers and long-range guns. The infantry brigade and howitzers were sent to him, but not the long-range guns.

Sir Redvers Buller telegraphed to the Secretary of State for War on 21st January :

‘ Warren has been engaged all day, chiefly on his left, which he has swung round about a couple of miles. The ground is very difficult, and, as the fighting is all the time up-hill, it is difficult exactly to say how much we gain, but I think we are making substantial progress.’

Early on the morning of the 22nd four howitzers arrived, and Sir Redvers Buller, who came over about the same time, gave directions where they were to be placed. Two were

brought into action on the height close to the batteries already in action there ; the others came into action on the left to keep down the Boer fire from Acton Homes. They were all effective in reaching the enemy's position, and fire was kept up by both sides until near sundown. Both sides retained generally the same positions at the close of the day.

It was on the 22nd that Sir Redvers Buller held a consultation with Sir Charles Warren and his Generals on the situation. Sir Charles, it is understood, pointed out that it would be impossible to get the wagons through by the road leading past Fair View, unless Spion Kop were first taken ; and Sir Redvers, who, it is believed, strongly objected to the wagons being sent back, agreed that Spion Kop would have to be taken ; but he preferred to make an attack from the British left flank from Bastion Hill, and proposed that it should be made that night. Both Sir Charles Warren and Lieut.-General Clery were, it is gathered, opposed to the proposal as a hazardous proceeding, because, if successful, it would mean to take the whole line of the enemy's position, which they might not be able to hold.

We learn from Sir Redvers Buller's own despatch that he was impatient of delay, and wanted an immediate attack, either to the right or to the left, preferably to the left, but an attack at once. It would seem that, in deference to the opinions expressed at the conference, Sir Redvers did not further press the attack from the left on that day, and Sir Charles Warren decided to attack Spion Kop that night, because, if the force must take the wagons, it was only possible to do so by making the road from Fair View to Groote Hoek safe for them, and the road could only be made safe for them by the capture of Spion Kop, which, as Sir Redvers Buller has observed, was evidently the key of the position.

We now see why Spion Kop was attacked. The Acton Homes route was out of the question, and there remained three courses or lines of action for consideration :

- (1) The attack from the left, on Salient, from Bastion Hill (favoured by Sir Redvers Buller, but deemed to be very hazardous by Sir Charles Warren and other generals) ;
- (2) The attack from the right, on Spion Kop,

which, if successful, would turn the enemy's position and the Boers would have to go ;

- (3) Continuous long-range and high-angle artillery fire on the Boer positions and trenches, by which the Orange Free Staters would be worn out and demoralised, leaving only the Transvaal Boers to be dealt with.

Sir Redvers Buller, commanding in chief, advocated the first. Sir Charles Warren, second in command, was in favour of the third. But as Sir Redvers Buller insisted on either the first or second, and Sir Charles Warren objected to the first, the second—that is, the attack from the right on Spion Kop—was decided upon.

Sir Charles Warren had been reinforced at noon of the 22nd by the 10th Brigade under Major-General Talbot Coke. The Brigades of both Major-Generals Hildyard and Hart were on the hills, as we have seen, in touch with the enemy. The choice, therefore, of a column for the assault of Spion Kop was limited to the 11th Brigade forming the right attack, or the 10th Brigade just arrived. Sir Charles Warren

selected the latter, and put Major-General Coke in orders to command the attack that same night. General Coke, however, asked for a delay of twenty-four hours to enable him to reconnoitre the position with the officers commanding the battalions to be employed in the assault, and to this Sir Charles assented.

On 23rd January Sir Redvers Buller again visited Sir Charles Warren, and, as he states in his despatch, again advocated an attack from the left. This, we have seen, Sir Charles Warren and his Generals had deemed too hazardous when considered on the previous day; and in the light of Sir Redvers Buller's memorandum 'not necessarily for publication,' in which he mentions how he went over to tell Sir Charles Warren that the Boer right was being strongly reinforced on the 21st, and also of his Vaal Krantz despatch of 8th February, in which he again mentions that the Boer right had been considerably strengthened, so much so that on 25th January any attempt to advance his left would probably have been unsuccessful, it is strange that he should on 23rd January have been so desirous to try his fortune in that direction.

Finding that his proposal to attack from the left was not concurred in by his juniors, Sir Redvers Buller would not take upon himself the responsibility of ordering it, and gave no direction to Sir Charles Warren beyond that which he mentions in his despatch—that he must either attack or his force would be withdrawn. Retirement was the last thing to be thought of, especially bearing in mind the general order to the troops in which Sir Redvers Buller told them there would be no turning back. Sir Charles Warren states in his despatch that, being given the alternative to attack or retire, he replied that he should prefer to attack Spion Kop to retiring, showed the Commander-in-Chief the orders of the previous evening, and explained the reason of the postponement of the attack for twenty-four hours.

On this same 23rd January Sir Redvers Buller telegraphed to the Secretary of State for War the following despatch, and it is a matter to note as we go along that in no one of these telegraphic despatches is there the slightest hint or expression that would lead the reader to suppose Sir Redvers Buller had any cause of

dissatisfaction, or that Sir Charles Warren was not carrying out the operations in accordance with his wishes :

‘Warren holds the position he gained two days ago. In front of him, at about 1,400 yards, is the enemy’s position west of Spion Kop. It is on higher ground than Warren’s position, so it is impossible to see into it properly. It can only be approached over bare, open slopes. The ridges held by Warren are so steep that guns cannot be placed on them, but we are shelling the enemy’s position with howitzers and field artillery, placed on the lower ground behind the infantry. Enemy reply with Creusot and other artillery. In the duel the advantage rests with us, as we appear to be searching his trenches, and his artillery fire is not causing us much loss. An attempt will be made to-night to seize Spion Kop, the Salient which forms the left of the enemy’s position facing Trichard’s Drift, and divides it from the position facing Potgieter’s. It has considerable command over all the enemy’s intrenchments.’

It was on 23rd January that Sir Redvers Buller altered Sir Charles Warren’s disposition,

and directed him to hand over to Major-General Coke the command of the 5th Division, retaining the command of the whole force across the Tugela. This step was no doubt taken to relieve Sir Charles Warren from over-work, and to free his hands for the more important duties of the general command ; but at such a time any change of the kind was unfortunate, and such a change naturally caused an entire alteration of arrangements, because there was no Staff supplied for the commander of the whole force, and the Staff of the 5th Division had carried on both the divisional duties and those for the whole force.

He had now to improvise a Staff for himself, and as he could get no regimental officers, as all regiments were short, he had to work with a very attenuated Staff.

‘ The Commander-in-Chief,’ says Sir Charles Warren, ‘ then desired that I should put General Woodgate in command of the expedition ’ to attack Spion Kop.

Sir Redvers Buller says he ‘ suggested that as General Coke was still lame from the effects of a lately broken leg, General Woodgate, who

had two sound legs, was better adapted for mountain climbing.'

Whether the word 'desired' or 'suggested' was used, it was regarded as an order, and Major-General Woodgate was detailed for the duty, while Lieutenant-Colonel à Court—an officer of Sir Redvers Buller's Staff—was directed to accompany him.

Now Major-General Talbot Coke was well known as an intelligent officer, much impressed with the use of the spade in war, and the importance of intrenching, and it was doubtless on this account that, in spite of his being slightly lame, he was selected by Sir Charles Warren for the command of the assaulting column.

It has been asked why Sir Charles Warren, whose activity and energy are so marked a feature of his character, did not lead the attack in person, and Lord Roberts regrets that he did not visit Spion Kop during the afternoon or evening of the 24th. It is stated on very good authority that he proposed to command the attack in person, but was forbidden by Sir Redvers Buller on the very reasonable and proper ground that, as commander of the whole force across the

Tugela, it was not his province to lead a portion of it : that he might have to give orders to his left as well as to his right, and for this reason he should not go up Spion Kop, but occupy a central position, whence he could issue orders to right and left, and be in communication with the Commander-in-Chief.

CHAPTER IV

BOER DEMORALISATION—TACTICAL IMPORTANCE OF
SPION KOP

BEFORE relating the capture of Spion Kop and the events of 24th January, it will not be amiss to see how the other side regarded the British operations up to this time, and what importance they attached to the position of Spion Kop ; and, further, how far it was tactically sound to occupy the hill in the circumstances.

In the diary of Mr. Raymond Maxwell, published in the 'Contemporary Review' of March 1901, we have the daily notes of a busy doctor in the Boer ambulance, who jots down shortly any scraps of information he hears about the operations going on. The doctor was not a Boer, nor even a naturalised burgher of the Transvaal, but a British subject who for three years had

practised as a medical man in the Transvaal and, when war became imminent, was asked to take the place of his colleague, Dr. Everard, who was down with malaria, in charge of a Boer ambulance, until Dr. Everard should be well enough to relieve him. As refusal meant expulsion and the loss of all his property, he consented to act, considering that at any rate under the Red Cross flag he was in a neutral position. His diary, which extends from 28th September 1899 to 20th February 1900, when Dr. Everard was well enough to relieve him, is instructive and illuminating, and from it we quote the following extracts, made during some of the days we have been considering :

‘ *January 20th.*—The English are now trekking for Acton Homes, and have occupied Mount Alice, on which they have posted artillery to cover the advance. A patrol from the Pretorian commando was surprised and cut off—forty-eight killed, wounded, and missing.

‘ The two forces are now getting into touch, and the English are evidently going to try and obtain the Thaba Mjama (Black Mountain) ridge.

‘January 21st.—Severe fighting going on. The English have got on to the ridge, and have put up schanzes all along it, and at some points are only eight hundred to nine hundred yards from our trenches. Our men are beginning to get very jumpy and nervous, as their trenches are lying mostly in open rolling country, and, according to many of the Burghers, could be rushed. There has been continuous rifle fire from the various schanzes and trenches all day. Two Ermelo men have been killed and five wounded. Total Boer casualties up there, so far, are sixty. The English artillery is magnificent, so much so that our guns can only be worked at intervals.

‘January 22nd.—All eyes are now directed to the Upper Tugela, and there is no doubt affairs there are becoming critical. The strain of the continuous fighting is beginning to tell on the Burghers, more especially as there are every day more or less casualties in the trenches. The Burghers get into the trenches before daylight, and then have to remain in them till they are relieved the next morning before day-break. The country is too open and exposed for

them to leave the trenches, unless it is dark. Moreover, they are expecting a rush some morning early, or a night attack.

‘*January 23rd.*—Excitement everywhere is intense, and if things continue like this for a few days longer, the Boers will break and run. Things are hanging in the balance, and the officers and burghers are looking more anxious now than when retreating through Weenen. The English have only to win through our trenches to the Ladysmith–Van Reenen road, i.e. about one mile of open rolling country, and then Ladysmith is practically relieved.

‘Owing to the Boer trenches not being “cast-iron” positions, and chiefly because they have no good back door to them, the Boers do not like them, and I verily believe the English are going to break through at last. The wear and tear and strain of the last two days’ fighting is telling very much on the burghers.’

Here we have evidence that Sir Charles Warren’s plan of advancing step by step after periods of continuous bombardment was demoralising the Boers, and that another day or

two of such bombardment would have enabled the British to rush the Boer trenches with success.

A writer of a paper entitled 'Pages from the Diary of a Boer Officer,' by another of them, contributed to the 'United Service Magazine' of February 1902, says, in reference to the importance of Spion Kop :

'The centre and key of the line of defence was Spion Kop, a flat-topped hill, which through its height dominated all the federal positions. . . . Besides being the central position this hill was the key of the federal line of defence and thus most important—the taking and the holding of Spion Kop by the English meaning the defeat of the Republicans and the relief of Ladysmith.'

With regard to the question—Was it tactically right to capture this hill?—said by both sides to be the key of the position, it seems an absurd question to ask; for if the advance could have been accomplished without taking it, it could not rightly be called the key of the position. Nevertheless, some critics have maintained that its capture was a blunder, and that, had it not been

abandoned, our chances of success would have been no greater.

Sir Charles Warren has discussed this question in one of his contributions to the 'National Review' in 1901 on 'Some Lessons from the South African War,' and it will not be out of place to quote his views on the subject which are given in the following extract :

'The Capture of a Hill.—Commanding sites in the vicinity of contending troops must always attract attention, because there is a natural impulse in man to strive for the higher ground. Recent criticisms, however, have rather deprecated this longing and have minimised the advantages the higher ground presents from a failure to comprehend the principles which govern the subject.

'It is quite true that in the defence of flat-topped hills, such as are found in South Africa, it is difficult to obtain a good fire down the steep slopes from trenches running along the edge or outer crest, without partly exposing the defenders. It is also admitted that strong positions can be taken up in gently swelling low ground with good glacis, or flat surfaces, for

frontal fire ; but the command of view from the summits of hills, and the immunity from being seen, must for a long time to come be powerful factors in the choice of defensive lines.

‘ The Boers, with a shrewdness and skill which smacks somewhat of European military aid, have, in cases where practicable, taken advantage of both conditions, by holding the outer edges, or crests, of flat-topped hills lightly, and by placing their main trenches about a mile behind on the hill’s comparatively flat surface. They thus derived all the advantage of the smooth glaxis for frontal fire, while they had command of view without being seen into, could not in many instances be touched by long-range guns, and in a great measure debarred the attack from using field guns against them, because the only positions they could be placed in were under rifle fire.

‘ For example, we may refer to the two Boer positions in front of Potgieter’s and Venter’s Spruit. The former was strongly situated in the low swelling ground north of the Tugela, but it could be seen into and bombarded by long-range guns at 7,000 yards, at a height of some

600 feet above it, and from as many field guns as could be brought together at 3,500 yards in the lowland north of the Tugela. The Venter's Spruit position, on the other hand, extending from the Rangeworthy farm round by Acton Homes, and thence into the Drakensberg, was quite as strongly situated on the swelling ground of the comparatively flat hill-top; but it also possessed the enormous advantage that the hills on which it was situated were over 1,000 feet above the Tugela, and thus it could not be seen into or dominated by our long-range guns, and with difficulty could field guns be brought against it: moreover, from it could be seen the movements of our troops. The main camps of the enemy were behind Spion Kop and Acton Homes, and were thus nearer the western position than the eastern. It is not too much to say that, had there been a high hill or a balloon in the vicinity overlooking the Venter's Spruit position as Zwart Kop does that of Potgieter's, the great strength of that position would have been more fully appreciated.

‘Let us now consider the advantage of occupying hills in the line of the advance of

an attack. They are obvious, both on account of the command of view they afford of the enemy's position, and because they screen from view and from fire a portion of the attack; but it is to be noted that the reverse slopes only of those hills can be securely held, not the flat summits. The only case in which it may be generally disadvantageous to hold a hill is when it is in such proximity to the enemy's lines that it can be taken in reverse or all round by the enemy's fire.

‘A most conspicuous instance of the secure holding of a hill within the enemy's lines occurred on 24th February, after the failure of the attack on the isolated position of Hart's Hill. During the retirement the 1st Battalion Durham Light Infantry kept possession of a nook or kloof on the side of that hill which could not be reached by the enemy's fire, and from which neither rifle fire nor shell could dislodge them. To the eye from afar they seemed to be in a perilous position, but they were secure.

‘The holding of such a position is not alluded to in our drill-book or in tactical works,

nor is it likely to be in favour with book tacticians for a long time to come; it is of too practical a character—the natural outcome of our troops returning to primitive ways and instinctively securing a position they could hold under stress of severe fire. The tactics of the future must eventually recognise the importance of the method of holding a hill, for it was by clinging to the reverse slope of hills that we were enabled to relieve Ladysmith with so comparatively small a loss when advancing against a superior force.

‘It was in this manner that we held our ground against superior numbers on the hills above Venter’s Spruit from 17th to 25th January 1900. Sir R. Buller describes our troops on this occasion as perched on the edge of an almost precipitous hill, admitting of no second line, and in his telegram of 27th January he says, “The actual position held was perfectly tenable.” Mr. Winston Churchill describes the position as follows: “The infantry had made themselves masters of all the edge of the plateau, and the regiments clustered in the steep re-entrants like flies on the side of a wall.” All through our

advance on Ladysmith the reverse slopes of hills we captured sheltered our forces.

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‘ Let us consider Spion Kop as a hill on the line of our advance—was its capture likely to be advantageous or not ?

‘ The summit at its southern extremity (the highest point of all the range) outflanked and could see down into our position at Three Tree Hill, and though just out of rifle range this was an undoubted advantage to the enemy. Moreover, it was higher by about 150 feet than any portion of the enemy’s lines, and could enfilade their trenches at long rifle range, and could see into their works, and also dominate their camps to the north.

‘ Evidently it was a desirable position for either side to hold ; but while the enemy could not (according to their mode of fighting) put guns upon it, it could, if in our possession, be so utilised. Our guns, placed on the lower slopes, could search out some of the enemy’s guns behind the Rangeworthy hills, and guns placed on the summit (as they might have been ultimately) would have forced the enemy to retire

from the Rangeworthy position, not necessarily altogether, but to take up a new position they had prepared further to the east. It was thus desirable as a possession if it were not an absolutely necessary objective in our advance.'

Captain Holmes Wilson in his 'Relief of Ladysmith' states that only the passive occupation of Spion Kop was contemplated, that 'the passive occupation of Spion Kop could never have led to anything,' that Spion Kop should not have been occupied unless it was intended to make at the same time a general advance along the whole line, and that 'the mere fact of going to the top of a high hill cannot constitute a tactical success as long as the enemy's moral courage lasts; when, however, the movement draws the fire of the whole of the opposing army it is more likely to end in a disaster than in defeat.'

These statements of Captain Wilson bristle with misapprehensions and misconceptions, and may be resolved into seven points on which explanations are necessary.

(1) As to the advantages or disadvantages of holding a hill in the line of advance of an attacking force, the advantages are: (a) that

the hill may give command of fire and a view of part of the enemy's line; (b) that it cannot so readily be seen into or commanded by fire; and (c) that it gives protection from the enemy's fire to troops properly placed behind it. The disadvantages arise when the hill projects so far into the enemy's line that it can be taken in flank or in reverse by the enemy's fire.

(2) The advantages of the occupation of hills during the war are exemplified in the following: Rangeworthy, Mount Alice, Zwart Kop, Hussar Hill, The Gomba, Monte Christo, Llangwani, Colenso Hills, Hart's Hill, and Pieters, with many others. In all these cases the hill was more or less exposed, but there were not such strenuous endeavours on the part of the Boers, and the British troops had learnt their lesson and knew how to dispose of themselves.

(3) Had Spion Kop been within the enemy's line of defence so that the enemy could fire along its front or into its front, i.e. get a fire on it of an arc of 180° or more, a passive occupation could not have been carried out, and a general advance would have been required. But Spion Kop was actually within the British line. The

arc of the enemy's fire directed on Spion Kop did not exceed 100° , i.e. not more than on any other position we held in our advance. The statement that it drew the fire of the whole Boer army is ludicrously impossible. The whole rifle fire of the enemy at short range was confined to an arc of about 100° , and could not have been from more than about 500 Boers. At long ranges it was confined to a hill in one direction at 2,000 yards distance. The guns that could fire on to it were from (i) a position in front of Three Tree Hill, (ii) east of Spion Kop, (iii) hill behind Spion Kop. Spion Kop was perfectly tenable, quite as tenable as any of the hills already named. The only difference was that in the case of Spion Kop the troops were all new, in the other cases they had learnt their severe lesson. It is impossible to compare the action of the troops on Spion Kop with their action subsequently.

(4) Spion Kop is not abnormally high. It is 1,500 feet above the Tugela, while the general line of Boer trenches on the Rangeworthy hills is about 1,200 to 1,300 feet above the Tugela. Spion Kop, when it was occupied by us, was

about 150 feet above the point—400 yards distant, occupied by the Boers. The Spion Kop range shelves down gradually to the east. It is about 500 feet above Three Tree Hill, and 500 to 600 feet above the neck, where it becomes steep. It is not a very formidable hill. It is about the height above the Tugela that the Rock gun at Gibraltar is above the level of the sea ; but then the point where the ascent was commenced was 400 feet above the Tugela, and carts could go some 400 feet higher, so that the climb at most was only 700 feet, or half the height of Gibraltar. A man in good condition could walk up and down several times during the day without fatigue. There was nothing formidable in the climb.

(5) The statement that the passive occupation of Spion Kop could not lead to anything is not borne out by the facts. The troops on Spion Kop had already outflanked the Boer position, and the Boer camp at the front of the hill had to be moved.

(6) Moreover, it is incorrect to say that only a passive occupation of Spion Kop was contemplated. The occupation of Spion Kop was

necessary before an advance could take place, but when it was captured the advance could be made, and would have been made if the hill had not been abandoned.

(7) The position occupied by the troops on the top of Spion Kop is described elsewhere, and was, no doubt, wrong. The inner crest should have been occupied in the first instance.

To sum up :

(1) There are decided advantages in the occupation of a hill in line of the advance to attack, if it be not abnormally high.

(2) The advantage was practically shown by the occupation of hills in similar positions to Spion Kop all through the war.

(3) Spion Kop was advantageously placed for occupation.

(4) It was not abnormally high.

(5) A passive occupation of it was sufficient at first, and in itself caused the Boers to shift their camp and turned their positions.

(6) The passive occupation would have given place to an active one on the following day, when the Boers could not have held their trenches.

(7) The position was one that should have been held.

CHAPTER V

CAPTURE OF SPION KOP AND ITS ABANDONMENT

ON 23rd January the command at the front was divided into two attacks under Sir Charles Warren; the left attack under Lieutenant-General Clery, with his two brigades, the 2nd and 5th; and the right attack under Major-General Talbot Coke with the 10th and 11th Brigades. Thus Major-General Coke had the command of the attack on Spion Kop and orders were issued by him and made to him in reference to the column of attack.

Major-General Woodgate having been selected for the command of this column, it devolved upon Major-General Coke as commander of the 5th Division and of the right attack to make all the arrangements in connection with it in consultation with Sir Charles Warren. He gave

orders that the column should consist of two and a half battalions of Major-General Woodgate's Brigade, the 2nd Royal Lancaster, 2nd Lancashire Fusiliers, and two companies South Lancashire, to which Sir Charles Warren added 200 of Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry, half the 17th Company Royal Engineers, and two companies of the Connaught Rangers to intrench half-way up in case of a check during the assault.

All the arrangements for the water supply, food, ammunition, Artillery and Engineers' services and for the wounded were arranged between Sir Charles Warren and Major-General Coke, with the aid of the officers commanding the Army Service Corps and the Royal Artillery, the Commanding Royal Engineer and the Principal Medical Officer. Sir Redvers Buller was asked by telegram to send over the mountain guns and also the East Indian water-carriers who were said to be in his camp. Sir Charles Warren had a long interview with Major-Generals Talbot Coke and Woodgate, in which, it is understood, the subjects of the attack and the intrenchments were discussed, and the orders

to Major-General Woodgate for the attack, founded on those of the previous day, were issued by Major-General Talbot Coke.

At seven o'clock in the evening of 23rd January Major-General Woodgate started with the column for the attack, the troops carrying rations for the following day with them. Mr. Bennet Burleigh in 'The Natal Campaign' gives the following graphic account of the march :

‘The force proceeded in the gloaming down the slope, moving rearward along the deep dongas to get upon the south side of Thaba Emanyama. Painfully going forward, scrambling over boulders and rocks in the darkness, the column, in two thin lines, silently, slowly neared the mountain. No smoking, no talking—the orders not to fire but to use the bayonet—the men held grimly onward. Almost every man carried a rifle, including General Woodgate. . . . Whenever a difficult part was reached Thorneycroft went ahead with two or three of his men to discover the best way of surmounting the obstacle, or ascertaining if Boers lay behind interposing ledges. General Woodgate, though far from well, persisted in leading his men. In steep

places he had in several instances to be pushed and pulled to assist him onward.'

The column arrived halfway up at half-past one o'clock in the morning of the 24th, and carried the summit at half-past three, some of Thorneycroft's men and of the Royal Engineers and South Lancashires rushing the position with fixed bayonets with a loss of only three men wounded. The cheers of the successful assailants were heard at the bivouac at Three Tree Hill, and when day broke the summit of Spion Kop was seen to be enveloped in thick mist, which no doubt had assisted the assaulting column to arrive at the top undiscovered.

Early in the morning the troops intrenched themselves as well as the darkness would admit, and from the bottom of the hill the Sappers commenced making a zigzag path to the summit for the water mules and the mountain battery to ascend, and later straight slides at the steep places for the naval 12-pr. guns which Sir Redvers Buller was to send over.

About half-past five o'clock in the morning the Boers, who had fled at the first assault, returned with strong reinforcements, and, as

the mist lifted from time to time, commenced firing at our troops from a kopje to the north, some 400 or 500 yards away. Our trenches, owing to the rocky nature of the plateau on the top, were very shallow, and, owing probably to the darkness and fog, were wrongly placed in the middle of the plateau.

At 7 A.M. Sir Charles Warren rode over from Three Tree Hill to the foot of Spion Kop, whence the ascent of the column had taken place, examined the approaches, and gave the Imperial Light Infantry instructions how they should advance to the support of the column without attracting the fire of the enemy. He then returned to Three Tree Hill, but the mist still prevented any signalling from the top of Spion Kop, and it was not until after nine o'clock that Sir Charles Warren received by the hands of Lieut.-Colonel àCourt, who had returned from the top, the following letter from Major-General Woodgate, written about two hours before :

‘ Spion Kop : 24th January 1900.

‘ Dear Sir Charles,—We got up about four o'clock, and rushed the position with three men

wounded. There were some few Boers, who seemed surprised, and bolted after firing a round or so, having one man killed. I believe there is another somewhere, but have not found him in the mist. The latter did us well, and I pushed on a bit quicker than I perhaps should otherwise have done, lest it should lift before we got here. We have intrenched a position, and are, I hope, secure ; but fog is too thick to see, so I retain Thorneycroft's men and Royal Engineers for a bit longer. Thorneycroft's men attacked in fine style. I had a noise made later to let you know that we had got in.

‘Yours &c.,

‘E. WOODGATE.’

Lieut.-Colonel àCourt expressed himself as quite satisfied that the summit could be held—‘held till doomsday against all comers,’ he said to Mr. Bennet Burleigh.

Not long after General Woodgate had written his letter to Sir Charles Warren the Boer fire grew very hot, and he fell mortally wounded. Colonel Blomfield of the Lancashire Fusiliers was also wounded soon after, and Colonel Crofton

of the Royal Lancasters, as senior officer, then assumed the command.

As the mist cleared, it became evident to those below and on Three Tree Hill that the schanzes held by our men on the top were exposed to both frontal rifle fire and to shell fire from the left front, and that a good deal of fighting was going on. Sir Charles Warren therefore directed Major-General Coke to send up the Imperial Light Infantry, who were posted at the foot of the hill, to reinforce Colonel Crofton, the Dorset Regiment taking their place at the foot.

A little before ten o'clock a message was received by Sir Charles Warren from Colonel Crofton which ran as follows :

‘ Reinforce at once or all lost. General dead.’

Sir Charles Warren replied :

‘ I am sending two battalions, and the Imperial Light Infantry are on their way up. You must hold on to the last. No surrender.’

It is due to Colonel Crofton to state that the message he ordered to be sent was, he says :

‘ General Woodgate dead ; reinforcements urgently required.’

The message was not written down by him,

or by the signalling officer, and it is impossible to trace how the alteration occurred.

The Dorset Regiment was then sent up, and subsequently the Middlesex Regiment. Sir Charles Warren went over to see Major-General Coke and directed him to go up himself to Spion Kop and, as Commander of the 5th Division and of the right attack, take command of the troops there—some 5,500 men. Major-General Coke left for Spion Kop about 11 A.M., and arrived on the slopes, some 600 feet below the summit, at noon.

At noon a message arrived from Sir Redvers Buller ordering Sir Charles Warren to place Lieut.-Colonel Thorneycroft in command on the summit. Sir Redvers Buller says he telegraphed to Sir Charles Warren: 'Unless you put some really good hard-fighting man in command on the top you will lose the hill. I suggest Thorneycroft.' Sir Charles Warren, though so much nearer the scene of operations than Sir Redvers Buller, was in a much inferior position for seeing what was going on at the top of Spion Kop, and, astonished though he may have been at the selection of this gallant young officer to

supersede the colonels commanding brigades and regiments, he regarded the intimation as an order—in fact, he says in his despatch it was an order—and he at once signalled to Colonel Crofton: ‘With approval of the Commander-in-Chief I place Lieutenant-Colonel Thorneycroft in command of the summit with the local rank of Brigadier-General.’

The confusion consequent upon this order will be considered further on.

At the same time Major-General Lyttelton, who had been bombarding all the morning with his artillery at Potgieter’s, apprised by Sir Charles Warren of Colonel Crofton’s telegram and asked to give assistance on his side of Spion Kop, demonstrated strongly by sending two squadrons of Bethune’s Horse and the Scottish Rifles to reinforce the extreme right on the top of the hill, while later the King’s Royal Rifles crossed the river and moved against a high point of Spion Kop. These troops did very good work, and in the afternoon Sir Charles Warren wired to Major-General Lyttelton: ‘The assistance you are giving most valuable. We shall try to remain *in statu quo*

during to-morrow. Balloon would be of incalculable value.'

In the meantime all available sandbags and tools for intrenching were sent by the hands of the troops going up, each man carrying something. Two hundred gallons of water were well on their way, some springs near the top were developed by the Engineers, the zigzag pathway was completed, and coils of 3-inch cable got ready for hauling up the naval guns.

Then followed an anxious time for Sir Charles Warren. The rifle and shell fire of the Boers was extremely hot on the top, the signallers had been hit and some of their apparatus destroyed, and for some two or three hours he was unable to get any replies to repeated inquiries. There was no news of the mountain guns or the naval 12-pr. guns, which Sir Redvers Buller was to send across the river to him—in fact, the former only left Springfield at eleven o'clock that morning.

A little after two o'clock in the afternoon news of the situation was received, sent an hour or so earlier by Major-General Coke, who was then on the plateau of the slopes below Spion Kop. The report was that the top of the hill was crowded

with men exposed to shell fire, but holding on well, that General Coke had stopped further reinforcements beyond the point where he was, at the same time letting the troops on the top know that help was close at hand, and ammunition being pushed up. From the report of Major-General Coke, recently published, it appears that on his way up he found the track very much congested with men, and, on hearing that the troops were crowded together on the top in a small space exposed to shell fire, very judiciously stopped the reinforcements that had not passed him; unfortunately he received urgent requests from the top soon after for more men, and allowed them to proceed.

Major-General Coke seems to have started from the plateau for the summit about three o'clock and to have reached it half an hour later, and was then *de facto* in command there over every one. For some time he was unable to find any one in command on the summit, or in touch with the signalling station at the Hospital Sangar. He was unaware that Lieut.-Colonel Thorneycroft had been placed in command on the summit with the rank of Brigadier-General,

although on his way up he had received a report from that officer which he forwarded with remarks to Sir Charles Warren, and which will be referred to later. Failing to find any one in command he passed over to the right and met Colonel Hill, who with the leading companies of the Middlesex Regiment got to the summit about noon, and, understanding that Colonel Crofton had been wounded, told Colonel Hill that the command devolved upon him as the next senior officer, and gave him detailed instructions as to intrenching at sundown. An hour later, while still on the top, but separated from Colonel Hill, he received the following message from him, sent at 5.5 P.M.:

‘We have now plenty of men for firing line, but the artillery fire from our left (west) is very harassing. I propose holding out till dark and then intrenching.’

The selection of Lieut.-Colonel Thorneycroft to take command over his seniors in the heat of action was a signal example of the danger of a serious departure from precedent at such a time. The difficulty of making a selection known and understood by all concerned was enormous, and

the risks of mistakes most serious. Lieut.-Colonel A. W. Thorneycroft was only a major of six months' standing in the Royal Scots Fusiliers, who held the local rank of Lieut.-Colonel while in command of a special corps. Brave and active to a degree, he was selected by Sir Redvers Buller because he was known as 'a good hard-fighting man,' and right well had he maintained his reputation during that morning ; but, just because he was such a man, he was at the front in the thick of the fight. 'The fight was too hot, too close, too interlaced for him to attend to anything but to support this company, clear those rocks, or line that trench.' ¹ But the commander on the top should have been out of the thick of it, able to direct the general conduct of matters and to keep in touch with his General below, leaving the actual fighting to his many able subordinates ; this meant a man of some experience in command, and this Lieut.-Colonel Thorneycroft, whatever else he was, certainly was not. Thus, although both the Officers Commanding Artillery and Engineers at the top of Spion Kop knew about the arrange-

¹ 'London to Ladysmith via Pretoria.'

ments for bringing up guns and intrenching at night, he seems to have heard nothing about it, and so also about water, food, ammunition, &c.

After General Coke's arrival on the summit many of the troops who had formed the storming party were allowed to go down the hill to get water and food.

About half-past four o'clock in the afternoon Sir Charles Warren received Lieut.-Colonel Thorneycroft's message, sent from the top two hours before, in which the situation was described as follows :

‘ Hung on till last extremity with the old force. Some of the Middlesex here now, and I hear Dorsets are coming up, but force really unable quite to hold so large a perimeter. Enemy's guns on north-west sweep the whole of the top of the hill. They also have guns to east. Cannot you bring artillery fire to bear on north-west guns ? What reinforcements can you send to hold the hill to-night ? We are badly in want of water. There are many killed and wounded. If you wish to really make a certainty of the hill for the night, you must send more infantry and attack the enemy's guns.’

Major-General Coke saw this message at his position at the signal station about three o'clock, just before leaving for the summit, and added the following observation :

‘I have seen the above and have ordered the Scottish Rifles and the King’s Royal Rifles to reinforce the Middlesex Regiment. The Dorset Regiment and the Imperial Light Infantry have also gone up. We appear to be holding our own at present.’

At six o'clock, before it got dark, Major-General Coke on the summit wrote an account of the situation (received by Sir Charles Warren at half-past seven), and having personally handed over command on the summit to Colonel Hill, and assured himself that he understood his duties and responsibilities, went back to the reserves half-way down the hill which he chose for the command post. There he remained until half-past nine in the evening, when, in obedience to an order from Sir Charles Warren, he went down to see him, leaving his deputy-assistant adjutant-general at the post to carry on the routine duties of the command in his name during his absence. Some hours before he

started down the hill, water and provisions were arriving regularly at the signal station and being passed to the top.

Down below Sir Charles Warren had been busy with arrangements for sending up at night all that was necessary to enable the position to be held next day. The mountain battery and naval 12-pr. guns, however, only arrived at Trichard's Drift between five and six o'clock in the afternoon.

Colonel Wood, R.E., who was on the top during the day, was fully informed of all that was to be done at sundown, although, of course, it was not possible to know precisely when the guns would reach the top until they actually came in from Trichard's Drift.

The mountain battery arrived at the foot of Spion Kop about half-past seven in the evening, completely tired out with their long march, and it was arranged that they should rest there until midnight, when the moon rose, and there would be plenty of time for them to ascend and get their guns into position on the top before daybreak. Notice of this was sent to Lieut.-Colonel Thorneycroft by the hand of a scout.

Major-General Coke could hardly have left the summit at 6.30 P.M. when Lieut.-Colonel Thorneycroft, as night was closing in, made up his mind that the hill was untenable. He sent the following message to Sir Charles Warren, which was not received that night :

‘The troops which marched up here last night are quite done up. They have had no water, and ammunition is running short. I consider that, even with the reinforcements which have arrived, it is impossible to permanently hold this place so long as the enemy’s guns can play on the hill. They have three long-range guns, three of shorter range, and several Maxim-Nordenfeldts, which have swept the whole of the plateau since 8 A.M. I have not been able to ascertain the casualties, but they have been very heavy, especially in the regiments which came up last night. I request instructions as to what course I am to adopt. The enemy are now firing heavily from both flanks, while a heavy rifle fire is being kept up in the front. It is all I can do to hold my own. If my casualties go on at the present rate I shall barely hold out the night. A large number of stretcher-bearers

should be sent up, and also all the water possible. 'The situation is critical.'

But he did not wait for a reply. At the time he despatched this message the intention to abandon the position had already been taken, for at half-past six o'clock the companies of the Royal Lancaster Regiment were ordered to form up near the dressing station preparatory to retirement and Lieut.-Colonel Thorneycroft himself says in his report :

' When night began to close in I determined to take some steps, and a consultation was held. The officer commanding Scottish Rifles and Colonel Crofton were both of opinion that the hill was untenable. I entirely agreed with their view, and so I gave the order for the troops to withdraw on to the neck and ridge where the hospital was.'

By seven o'clock orders were issued for the troops to retire on the Hospital Sangar, and the collecting of the men and bringing in of the wounded commenced. It is said that Colonel Hill had a warm discussion with Lieut.-Colonel Thorneycroft, who, however, asserted his right as brigadier-general commanding on the summit

to order a retirement. He neither sent word to Major-General Coke nor to Sir Charles Warren. Why Colonel Hill did not tell Lieut.-Colonel Thorneycroft that the former had only just left the hill remains unexplained.

At the time that Major-General Coke left his post in charge of his Staff Officer the preparations for retirement had been in full swing for three hours.

The first intimation that Captain Phillips, Major-General Coke's Staff Officer, had of the retirement was being awakened at the command post by the sound of men moving at 11.30 P.M. He then found a general retirement proceeding. He at once stopped the flow of men down the hill—the Scottish Rifles and a large number of stragglers of the Dorset, Middlesex, and Imperial Light Infantry, whom he collected. The reserves—Bethune's Mounted Infantry and the bulk of the Dorsets—remained in position as posted in support of the front line. The other corps had gone down the hill, and Lieut.-Colonel Thorneycroft with them. Captain Phillips promulgated the following memorandum to all commanders, but they did not act on it, urging

that they had distinct orders from Lieut.-Colonel Thorneycroft :

‘ Officers Commanding Dorsetshire and Middlesex Regiments, Scottish Rifles, Imperial Light Horse :

‘ The withdrawal is absolutely without the authority of either Major-General Coke or Sir Charles Warren. The former was called away by the latter a little before 10 A.M. When General Coke left the front about 6 P.M. our men were holding their own, and he left the situation as such, and reported that he could hold on. Some one, without authority, has given orders to withdraw, and has incurred a grave responsibility. Were the General here, he would order an instant reoccupation of the heights.

‘ H. E. PHILLIPS,

‘ Deputy-Assistant Adjutant-General.’

At that time, 11.30 P.M., the spur was still held to within about 300 yards of the summit, but the summit itself was evacuated. Signalling communication could not be established because the oil had run out.

In the meantime, at nine o’clock, Colonel Sim,

R.E., with 200 men of the Somersetshire Regiment, carrying tools, started to construct the emplacements for the naval guns. Sir Charles Warren gave him a letter to Lieut.-Colonel Thorneycroft explaining the work Colonel Sim had to do and telling him it was of vital importance that the summit should be held.

When the troops were being marched off to go down the hill by Lieut.-Colonel Thorneycroft about 10 P.M., Mr. Winston Spencer Churchill arrived with the information that the mountain guns and a naval 12-pr. gun were coming up during the night. As Lieut.-Colonel Thorneycroft was going down the hill about midnight he met Lieut.-Colonel Sim, who gave him Sir Charles Warren's letter. He said it was too late, as the men, unsupported by guns, could not stay. He ordered Lieut.-Colonel Sim to take his party back. Lieut.-Colonel Sim sent them back and himself went on to ascertain if the retirement was general, and, finding it was so, he walked up the valley to warn the officer in command of the naval gun of the altered situation, and prevent him risking his gun by moving it to the evacuated hill-top.

Half-past two on the morning of 25th January was an hour to be remembered by many of the actors in this abortive enterprise. Captain Phillips at the Commanding General's post had managed to get the signals to work and sent the following message :

‘ Spion Kop : 25th January 1900. 2.30 A.M.

‘ *General Officer Commanding Three Tree Hill :*

‘ Summit of Spion Kop evacuated by our troops, which still hold lower slopes. An unauthorised retirement took place. Naval guns cannot reach summit before daylight ; would be exposed to fire if attempted to do so by day.’

About 2.30 A.M. the following message from Lieut.-Colonel Thorneycroft reached Sir Charles Warren :

‘ 24th January 1901 (no hour fixed).

‘ Regret to report that I have been obliged to abandon Spion Kop, as the position became untenable. I have withdrawn the troops in regular order, and will come to report as soon as possible.

‘ ALEC THORNEYCROFT,
‘ *Lieut.-Colonel.*’

No messenger was sent down to acquaint Sir Charles Warren of the intention to retire taken as early as 6.30 P.M. ; no heed was paid to the vigorous protests of either Colonel Hill or Captain Phillips, and Sir Charles Warren's positive instructions received on the way down by the hand of Colonel Sim were treated with scant respect—in fact, were ignored ; and so it came to pass that Major-General Coke, summoned by Sir Charles Warren at nine o'clock, and Lieut.-Colonel Thorneycroft, unsummoned, arrived together at Sir Charles Warren's headquarters about 2.30 A.M. on the 25th, and for the first time he heard of the abandonment of the hill after the retirement had been completed, and found all his plans at once swept away.

Mr. Bennet Burleigh says in 'The Natal Campaign' :

' Had the troops but waited throughout the night until the guns and Engineers arrived, the whole situation of affairs would have been completely changed. I met the mountain battery, on the evening of the battle, on its way up. The naval guns were a little farther off, and the Engineers were also on the march. Then I and

everybody thought that the firing had been practically finished for the day, and that Warren's preparations for the absolute holding of Spion Kop would be carried through before morning. That, in that event, the Boers must beat a retreat all along the line none could doubt.'

After a careful consideration of all the circumstances who can wonder that Lord Roberts stated in his despatch of 13th February 1900 that he was unable to concur with Sir Redvers Buller in thinking that Lieut.-Colonel Thorneycroft exercised a wise discretion in ordering the troops to retire, or can fail to agree with Lord Roberts that his assumption of responsibility and authority was wholly inexcusable?

CHAPTER VI

AFTER WITHDRAWAL—BOER COMMENTS

ON the morning of 25th January Sir Redvers Buller went over to see Sir Charles Warren and decided to assume command and to withdraw to the south side of the Tugela. Then General Warren 'made his retirement memorable for speed and orderliness,' and by 8 A.M. on 27th January 'the force was concentrated south of the Tugela, without the loss of a man or a pound of stores.' That the retirement was effected without molestation by the Boers is evidence that the capture of Spion Kop had surprised them and the week's fighting and bombardment had demoralised them.

But if the retirement from Spion Kop was a surprise to Sir Charles Warren and to Sir Redvers Buller, it was equally so to the Boers. Mr. Bennet Burleigh tells us :

'In the morning, after daybreak, the enemy

could scarcely credit their senses that our soldiers had left the hill-top. "Where are the soldiers?" the few Boer scouts who rode forward under the white flag asked our surgeons and ambulance men. "Gone!" "What for?" And subsequently it leaked out from several of them that they had thought the position was lost and they had begun trekking.'

It is interesting to note the views of those on the Boer side. For instance, in the article in the 'United Service Magazine,' giving the diary already referred to of a Boer officer, we find the following observations:

'The English had employed the night (23rd to 24th January) in making some wide but low shallow trenches, with corresponding parapets of stones, earth, and sods to shelter behind. . . . These trenches had been established more or less in the centre of the plateau, which was a fatal blunder, this being the very spot where, in the circumstances, a concentrated artillery fire would tell with the deadliest effect.

'The fight dragged on until the evening, and the position was not recaptured. Those Federals who left the hill at dark thought that the

effort to dislodge the English had been a failure—that the fight was lost. It seemed a Platrand fiasco over again, notwithstanding the fine work done by the Federal artillery, and the fact that the retaking of a position like Spion Kop was an easier task than the storming of a defence like Platrand.

‘The night of the 24th to the 25th was one of confused and chaotic panic, which strongly savoured of the beginning of a rout. In the estimation of many the hour of hasty retreat had no doubt sounded, and horses’ heads were turned Ladysmithwards without waste of time. It was expected that the English would make an attack in force next morning, or perhaps in the night, but the demoralisation was so great that no regular watches were kept all along the line of defence in the proximity of Spion Kop. Here and there, it is true, some determined fellows clubbed together with the resolve to have one more trial the next morning, but there is no doubt that if the British had attacked that night the Federals would have made but poor resistance at the utmost, and that their rout would have been a matter of course. Had the English only held the Spion

Kop in force until the morning, a second struggle, weakened as the Federals were, would have meant an heroic effort, a short fight, and the success of the English.

‘It was with feelings of blended wonder and thankfulness that some of the Pretoria men and some Free Staters under Commandant Cronje, on climbing the Kop at daybreak, found it tenanted only by corpses and some wounded. Lo! the English had gone! Was it possible? It might be a trap! But no, it was the truth: no soldiers, with the exception of the harmless dead and crippled Khakis, were in sight. The incredible news spread.

‘The exultation of the foreigners at the new gift of victory made to the Federals by English incompetency was great. The remarks uttered in different languages may be condensed in the words of a German officer whose critical judgment was short and to the point: “Wahrhaftig! Dummheit gegen Unwissenheit.” (“Truly, stupidity against ignorance.”) The Boers, hardly knowing what exultation means, were less loud and less given to criticise, but the astonishment they manifested was a censure not to be gainsaid.

. . . Why the English abandoned the Kop in the night from the 24th to the 25th is for me and many others somewhat of a mystery.'

Mr. Raymond Maxwell, in the Boer ambulance, records in his diary :

'*January 24th.*—It was rumoured last night that Kimberley had fallen, but this is most likely spread about owing to the critical position at Upper Tugela.

'Fighting began to be very heavy at Upper Tugela early this morning, and a very big affair is going on. At mid-day news came that the English had occupied Spion Kop, a high ridge to the left of the Boer positions, and completely commanding them, during the night. The Boers stormed the hill at daylight, and got to the ridge, and then fearful fighting began at practically point-blank ranges. Our artillery and pom-poms were posted so as to shell the top, and the English are suffering severely, though still sticking to the position. After sundown news came that somewhere about 1,000 troops were taken prisoners on the top. At dark the burghers decided that they had had enough of it, and retired and left the troops in posses-

sion of the Kop. Wild rumours are flying about, and everything is beginning to point to a general retirement on to Ladysmith, or possibly to the Biggarsberg. It is even said that the Upper Tugela laagers have begun to pack up and prepare to trek. Boers killed said to number forty.

‘Owing to the confusion it is impossible to get authentic news. Two light carriages arrived to-day to transport my wounded, but no mules were sent to drag them.

‘*January 25th.*—All the morning the excitement has been terrible. This evening news came that for some inscrutable reason the English retired from Spion Kop the night of the fight or early this morning. The burghers are wild with delight, and are now beginning to claim a great and glorious victory. The English have suffered heavy losses, and then go and throw up a hard-won position—a position which practically meant the relief of Ladysmith. From it they could have flanked all the Lower Tugela positions, i.e. if the burghers had remained in them to be flanked. Between Spion Kop and Ladysmith is country easy to negotiate, with good roads and good enough water. With

Spion Kop and the Acton Homes positions being held, it would have been possible to make use of the Van Reenen main road to bring the convoys up. Goodness only knows what will happen now, though they still hold the Thaba Nyama ridges and may be able to break through from there.

‘Prisoners number 250, mostly Lancashire Fusiliers. The Boer loss is 200 certain, and an uncertain number unaccounted for. The English loss must have been very heavy, as our artillery was playing on to them all the time. General Woodgate is said to have been killed.

‘The rumour of Kimberley’s surrender is now denied.

‘*January 26th.*—It now appears that the English made a great blunder in the manner in which they took up their positions on the top of the hill. They surprised and drove off the Boer picket, and then started to intrench. Instead of intrenching along the front ridge, they threw up trenches in the middle of the top; and varying from fifty to 150 yards from the edge. The Boers were thus enabled to climb up their side of the hill without

being fired on, and as soon as they reached the ridge the positions of the two forces were equal, or, rather, the Boers had the better of it, as the English artillery could not get at them.

‘If the trenches had been at the front edge, not a Boer could have got up, as the ascent is very, very steep.

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‘*January 31st.*—I rode over and saw the schanzes, trenches, &c., of our men, and the English at Thaba Nyama. The two positions extend for a long way, nearly parallel to each other. The Boer positions consisted of long isolated trenches dug in the bare veldt, and for Boer positions were undoubtedly weak and unsatisfactory. The English had schanzed the long ridge for a great distance. The schanzes were beautifully made, and in many places were compartments large enough to hold three men lying down. The distance between the positions varied from 1,000 yards in some places to 1,800 in others. In front of the English left was a sort of kloof. Between one edge of this and the schanzes was a flat of about eighty yards.

Between the other edge and a long Boer trench was an open slope of about 100 yards. For some reason the English would jump out from the schanzes in batches of twenty-five or thirty men, and make a run for the kloof, and it was while doing this that most of the English were shot. If they had waited till dark, as many men as required could have got into the kloof without any risk, and then a night attack or a rush on the trench could have been made at daylight. This was what the Boers were afraid of for five or six days. The country at the back of the trench is often rolling veldt, affording no cover for any retiring force, and if an attack had been made the Boers would have had to have stopped and made a fight of it. There were millions of empty cartridges lying about, and also several unburied soldiers.

‘February 2nd.—I rode up to the top of Spion Kop and had a good look round. General Botha had obtained a twenty-four hours’ armistice, so that the English dead might be properly buried, as our men had to hold the position and the stench was too dreadful.

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‘In some places the English trenches were just behind one another, and quite parallel, and in the flurry and excitement of the fight it would be surprising if some of the men in the front trenches were not shot from behind. From the Kop we could also see Chieveley and Ladysmith, and the people in the latter must have been able to see the fight and the Boer retreat, and what they must have suffered the next day, when it dawned on them that the English were not going to hold the position after having won it, can be easily imagined.’

CHAPTER VII

SOME CRITICISMS

IF we inquire what was thought at home of the failure at Spion Kop after the high hopes which the advent of Sir Charles Warren in Natal had raised, we must look back for a moment to the beginning of the operations and note the great interest with which the news from Natal was day by day eagerly read by the public. The excitement caused by the second attempt of Sir Redvers Buller to relieve Ladysmith by a turning movement to the left of Potgieter's Drift was greatly increased when his telegram, dated 23rd January, 6.30 P.M., was received, stating that General Warren held the position he had gained two days before, and that 'an attempt will be made to-night to seize Spion Kop, the Salient which forms the left of the enemy's position facing Trichard's Drift and divides it from the position facing Potgieter's.'

The public remained in suspense until the announcement came that Spion Kop had been captured and that Warren considered it tenable. Then there were loud rejoicings everywhere, too soon, alas, disturbed by sinister rumours of failure, coming in some mysterious way from the Continental Press, and then the brief telegram of 25th January: 'Warren's garrison, I am sorry to say, I find this morning had in the night abandoned Spion Kop'; followed subsequently by another exonerating Colonel Thorneycroft from all blame.

The position in consequence thus presented itself to the public: The attack on Spion Kop had for some unknown reason proved a failure, and the relief of Ladysmith had been thereby indefinitely postponed. Somebody was to blame. Sir Redvers Buller said Warren's garrison had abandoned Spion Kop, but he exonerated Thorneycroft. The natural inference was that Warren was the man to be hanged. Then came the reaction, and the fickle public turned to rend the unsuccessful Generals. This state of feeling was not improved by the publication, after many weeks' delay, of the despatches in which Sir Redvers

Buller throws the whole blame upon Sir Charles Warren, and not only exonerates Thorneycroft but considers that he saved the situation ; in which also Lord Roberts is of opinion that Lieut.-Colonel Thorneycroft's assumption of responsibility and authority was needless, unwarrantable, and wholly inexcusable ; that Sir Charles Warren should have visited Spion Kop during the afternoon or evening ; that ' there was a want of organisation and system which acted most unfavourably on the defence ' ; and that the failure of the attempt to relieve Ladysmith was probably in part due to errors of judgment and want of administrative capacity on the part of Sir Charles Warren ; but that it must also be ascribed to Sir Redvers Buller's disinclination to assert his authority.

With the dismay felt at the folly of the Government in making such a wanton exhibition to the world of the shortcomings of our commanders in the field there was mingled a grim satisfaction that in censuring all concerned the public disappointment was avenged. Lord Roberts had administered a rough sort of justice. There had been a failure, and all the leading actors in the business were blamed ; but

the one who came off worst was Sir Charles Warren. Sir Redvers Buller had thrown the blame on Sir Charles Warren, but had supported Lieut.-Colonel Thorneycroft. No one spoke for Sir Charles Warren, who was not allowed to speak for himself. Consequently the critics took up the parable, and Sir Charles Warren was blamed for everything that occurred.

We doubt very much whether, if Spion Kop had been held and the relief of Ladysmith had followed, we should have heard much of the criticism that has been freely used ; its seizure would have been regarded as a brilliant tactical success, as indeed it was regarded at the time, and it is only necessary to point to the English newspapers and the letters of the Press correspondents before the abandonment was known to show this.

Now a tactical operation cannot be right or wrong merely because some subsequent action makes it futile. We have the evidence of the Boers that they considered Spion Kop the key of the position and that, had it been held, Ladysmith would probably have been won. Surely, then, the blame of failure should not be thrown upon the

General who ordered it to be taken, but on the officer who abandoned it without sufficient reason and without consulting him.

Mr. Oppenheim has written a defence of this officer in the 'Nineteenth Century,' in which he says that Lieut.-Colonel Thorneycroft had to come to some decision, and that he had held on all day hoping for the presence or intervention of a superior officer. But Lieut.-Colonel Thorneycroft was himself a brigadier-general commanding the colonels in command of two brigades, and the only use he made of this position was to force them to withdraw; while Major-General Coke, his superior officer, was on the summit from half-past three to half-past six, and Lieut.-Colonel Thorneycroft does not appear to have made any effort to get instructions from him or to refer to him before ordering a retirement at dark.

Mr. Oppenheim states that Lieut.-Colonel Thorneycroft did not know that stores of ammunition, water, food, &c., were on their way up; but this is no excuse, because, if he had gone to his proper post of command, he would have known it; but he stuck to his own corps, and never really exercised the command until he

decided to retire. He also states that all agreed it was impossible to hold the hill. But Colonel Hill and Major-General Coke evidently did not agree. Colonel Hill had made preparations for intrenching, and knew where the tools and sandbags were, although Colonel Thorneycroft did not.

Two great faults were committed on the summit of Spion Kop, for neither of which can Sir Charles Warren be held responsible. The one was the position of the intrenchments, with regard to which Sir Charles Warren had given special instructions. There are two methods adopted for intrenching a hill when attacked by an advancing force. The usual method is to intrench the crest nearest to the enemy, but this involves moving across the top of the hill without cover. The other method is to intrench the crest farthest away from the enemy in the first place, as this gives complete security to the attack, neither rifle nor shell fire being able to touch it, and when opportunity offers, after artillery cannonading, or at night, to advance to the other crest nearest the enemy and intrench there ; but at Spion Kop, owing perhaps to the fog, neither one nor the other method was adopted, the

trenches were placed in the middle of the plateau, and, as made, were not of much use—too little earth was thrown up, and a little earth will not resist a Mauser bullet. If earth is used it must be in considerable quantity, and there was not much available. There were, however, plenty of stones, with which the Boers soon construct their cover. Badly-made trenches placed in an absolutely wrong and a most exposed position, contrary to Sir Charles Warren's instructions, constituted the first fault.

The second fault committed on the summit was crowding line upon line to give the firing line moral support. The result was carnage. The officers commanding brigades and Colonel Thorneycroft clamoured for reinforcements to give this moral support. Major-General Coke several times checked the upward move of reinforcements, but in the end gave way to urgent messages and let them go on until by 3.30 P.M. the small summit was crowded with five battalions besides details. Sir Redvers Buller, Sir Charles Warren, Major-Generals Coke and Lyttelton, and Colonel àCourt all thought two battalions on the top sufficient.

Both these faults were due to want of proper training of both officers and men.

We shall now consider Sir Redvers Buller's despatches and memorandum of 30th January 1900 in some detail, and make some very adverse criticisms. It is with reluctance that we do so, but it must be remembered that Sir Redvers has no one but himself to blame that these despatches are before the public. It was his own doing that they saw the light in the first instance, and it is equally his own doing that the portions omitted in the first instance have lately been published too. It is only, therefore, in justice to Sir Charles Warren, who has not been allowed to reply, that we examine these despatches critically.

It will not be forgotten that a despatch written a month earlier on the Zoutspan Drift action was perused by critics at home with amazement and perplexity. The easy insouciance with which the late Adjutant-General of the Forces, who for seven years had been primarily responsible for the training of the officers and men of the army, referred to their want of training when tried in the field, it was felt, could not easily be surpassed.

‘I suppose,’ he wrote, ‘our officers will learn the value of scouting in time, but in spite of all one can say, up to this our men seem to blunder into the middle of the enemy, and suffer accordingly.’

But his despatches of 30th January throw this one into the shade in their complete detachment from all responsibility, and recall, more than anything else, the reports of an umpire at peace manœuvres, which praise this side and blame that, with the comfortable assurance that the writer is an independent observer, on whom no one can turn the tables.

In the first of the two despatches of 30th January Sir Redvers Buller gives no indication, as we have already pointed out, of what he intended Sir Charles Warren to do when he sent him across the Tugela. He merely regrets that an expedition, which he thinks should have succeeded, failed, and refers to Sir Charles Warren’s despatch for particulars. The only comment on Sir Charles Warren’s dispositions was that he had ‘mixed up all the brigades, and the positions he held were dangerously insecure.’

In the second despatch, while maintaining the same attitude of irresponsibility, he adopts

the *rôle* of the captious critic. He objects to Sir Charles Warren's statement that three and a-half days' supplies were insufficient to advance by the left through Acton Homes, because, he says, he had promised to keep—and was actually keeping—Sir Charles filled up. As if this in any way affected the amount of provisions he could carry with him when once he had cleared the position in front and moved forward and away from the Tugela.

From this trivial and futile criticism Sir Redvers jumps suddenly to 23rd January, on which day, he says, he went over to see Sir Charles Warren and pointed out that he had no further report, and no intimation of the special arrangements foreshadowed in a telegram from him on the 19th. It might from this be supposed that since the 19th Sir Redvers had had no communication with Sir Charles Warren, was getting anxious, and thought it time after four days' silence to inquire what he was doing; it would hardly occur to any one that he was in constant telegraphic communication with Warren, and that he had been with him both on the 21st and the 22nd of the month.

What were the special arrangements referred to in Sir Charles Warren's letter of the 19th, and why is it suggested that they were kept, so to speak, up his sleeve, until his Commander could stand it no longer?

'On January 20th,' said Sir Redvers Buller in his telegraphic despatch of 27th January, 'Sir Charles Warren, as I have reported, drove back the enemy and obtained possession of the southern crests of the higher tableland, which extends from the line Acton Homes-Honger's Poort to the Western Ladysmith Hills.' We may conclude, therefore, that on the 20th Sir Charles Warren was too fully occupied to telegraph what were the special arrangements he had mentioned in his telegram of the night before. On the 21st Sir Redvers Buller saw him and was able to discuss the matter verbally with him, and if he did not do so surely it was his own fault, as he might very easily have asked him anything he wanted to know.

These special arrangements were apparently three :

- (1) Continual bombardment ; then
- (2) To advance on both sides of an arête or

gully, outflanking the enemy on either side as he advanced ; and finally

(3) To proceed without wagons when he had driven the enemy out.

They resulted, as we have seen, from the reconnaissances of the 18th, which impressed Sir Charles Warren with the difficulties of any advance with fifteen miles of wagons. He therefore proposed to keep the wagons at Venter's Laager until he was able to advance, and then send them back across the river. There was no great secret about these proposals. With the first and second Sir Redvers apparently concurred, and with the third he did not. If he thought Sir Charles had anything else in view, why did he not ask him ?

Sir Redvers Buller, in his despatch of 30th January, then goes on to say that he further pointed out to Sir Charles Warren 'that for four days he had kept his men continuously exposed to shell and rifle fire, perched on the edge of an almost precipitous hill, that the position admitted of no second line and the supports were massed close behind the firing line in indefensible formations, and that a panic or

sudden charge might send the whole lot in disorder down the hill at any moment. I said it was too dangerous a situation to be prolonged, and that he must either attack, or I should withdraw his force. I advocated, as I had previously done, an advance from his left.'

One has really to call to mind that it is Sir Charles Warren's commanding officer who gives utterance to these observations, that he personally saw the troops under Warren cross the Tugela, that he issued to them the 'no turning back' order, that he addressed General Woodgate's Brigade when it had crossed and gave that General instructions as to his attack, that from day to day he telegraphed home encouraging accounts of the operations being carried out, that he made no sign of disapproval, that he was in telegraphic communication with Sir Charles Warren all the time and many messages passed to and fro, that on three days out of the four—viz. on the 21st, 22nd, and 23rd—he was personally present with the force and the dispositions of the troops were made subject to his approval, that he had himself given directions how the howitzers were to be disposed, and that in

his telegraphic despatch of 27th January, when all was over, he had stated that 'the actual position held was perfectly tenable but did not lend itself to advance.' It was surely unfair to himself as well as to Sir Charles Warren to make out that for four days the troops remained in one position, and that a dangerous one.

But if the dispositions were those of Sir Charles Warren, and he alone was responsible for them, did they merit the disapproval with which his chief stigmatises them? Is not the attack of a hill, whose top is exposed to the enemy's artillery fire and affords barely any cover, best undertaken by seizing and holding the near crest line—in other words, 'perching on its edge'? If the attack intrench this near crest, their reserves can remain lower down under cover; any shell fire which does not hit the trench passes harmlessly over; reliefs, also, can be safely carried out, and supplies of ammunition, water, and food brought up to the firing line without exposure.

As we have already observed, and perhaps may be permitted to repeat in this connection, had Sir Charles Warren's instructions been carried out at Spion Kop—and probably the fog

made it difficult to do so—his firing line would have been on the outer edge of the hill, that farthest from the enemy, and not on the plateau, and what better position could it have had? A small body could have held it, which could have been relieved from time to time, and at night-fall the other crest nearest to the enemy could have been seized and intrenched. Then again reserves massed behind a hill are not in so bad a position as Sir Redvers Buller's despatch would imply, and when he speaks of the danger of a possible sudden charge of the Boers driving the whole lot of our men in disorder down the hill, he does not appear to appreciate the distinctive qualities either of the foe or of our own men. What would Tommy Atkins have more warmly welcomed, or the Boers have more disliked, than a contest at close quarters with cold steel?

Unfortunately, the feeble intrenchments which were constructed on Spion Kop were too far advanced on the plateau of the hill, so that the approach to them from the edge of the hill was exposed to the shell and rifle fire of the enemy, and, equally unfortunately, neither mountain battery nor naval guns were sent over by Sir

Redvers Buller in time to be of use in opposing the Boer fire.

In a previous chapter we noted that no sign of dissatisfaction with Sir Charles Warren's conduct appeared in any of Sir Redvers Buller's telegrams during the operations, and if these telegrams are compared with the despatches they will be found to be glaringly inconsistent.

We find, further, that while in large matters, such as the attack from the left, in which the strategy of the Commander-in-Chief might be involved, Sir Redvers Buller contented himself with advocating the course he preferred, and abstained from giving any order for its adoption, in comparatively small matters, which would more obviously lie within the province of the subordinate commander to determine, he, on several occasions, caused his own views to be carried out. Thus he substituted Major-General Woodgate for Major-General Coke in the command of the column for the assault of Spion Kop, because the one was able to climb better than the other; and he nominated over the heads of experienced colonels Lieut.-Colonel Thorneycroft, a young and inexperienced major

of a year's standing, holding the local rank of lieutenant-colonel, to command on Spion Kop after Major-General Woodgate was wounded, because he was a good hard-fighting man. Neither physical strength and ability to climb nor the gallantry of a fighting man are, however, the main qualifications of a commander, and these efforts of the Commander-in-Chief to assert himself in minor matters had, it would seem, something to say to the failure of the enterprise.

That Sir Redvers Buller should endeavour to justify the retirement of Lieut.-Colonel Thorneycroft is not difficult to understand ; that he should attempt to do so at the expense of his second-in-command is inexplicable. It was only human nature that he should wish to support the action of the gallant young officer, specially selected by himself to command over the head of his seniors, who had fought like a lion and had kept up the spirit of his men in depressing circumstances.

But had the same warm and generous sentiment animated him towards his second-in-command he could not have supported the retirement

by disparaging the work done by Sir Charles Warren, and by belittling or ignoring altogether the efforts he had made to enable the garrison of Spion Kop to hold on to the position.

Probably the unkindest cut of all, though no doubt the result of thoughtlessness, was Sir Redvers Buller's telegram of 25th January: 'Warren's garrison, I am sorry to say, I find this morning had in the night abandoned Spion Kop.' He might have said 'Thorneycroft's garrison,' and he could well have afforded to say 'my garrison,' but this would have been to abandon the *rôle* of the irresponsible critic.

So also he declined to hold any investigation into the circumstances of the withdrawal as proposed by Sir Charles Warren. He says in his despatch :

'I have not thought it necessary to order any investigation. If at sundown the defence of the summit had been taken regularly in hand, intrenchments laid out, gun emplacements prepared, the dead removed, the wounded collected, and, in fact, the whole place brought under regular military command, and careful arrangements made for the supply of water and food to

the scattered fighting line, the hills would have been held, I am sure.

‘But no arrangements were made. General Coke appears to have been ordered away just as he would have been useful, and no one succeeded him ; those on the top were ignorant of the fact that guns were coming up, and generally there was a want of organisation and system that acted most unfavourably upon the defence.’

Such a string of inconsistencies and erroneous statements only shows that not only did Sir Redvers Buller not think it necessary to order an official investigation, but that he did not even think it necessary before writing his despatch to take the trouble to ascertain the facts for himself.

At sundown, before any defence could be taken regularly in hand, the abandonment had not only been decided upon by Lieut.-Colonel Thorneycroft, but the preparations for retirement were actually commenced. This he might have gathered from Lieut.-Colonel Thorneycroft’s report, in which he says : ‘When night began to close in I determined to take some steps,’ &c., and there must have been other reports, which have not been published, before him from which

he could have known the precise time when the retirement was arranged.

After categorically enumerating the various arrangements that should have been made at nightfall in order to hold the position on the following day, Sir Redvers Buller writes : 'But no arrangements were made.' He does not say who should have made them, or who should have carried them out, but the inference from what he says is that as 'General Coke appears to have been ordered away just as he would have been useful,' he considers that Major-General Coke should have made them.

But Major-General Coke did not receive the order to go and see Sir Charles Warren until 9.30 P.M., some three hours after nightfall, and after the order for withdrawal had been given.

In refutation of Sir Redvers Buller's assertion that no arrangements were made, in face of all the reports he had before him, some of which have been published, showing what arrangements were made, let us see if it can be ascertained what actually was done.

PRECAUTIONS TAKEN AND ARRANGEMENTS MADE

Hospital and Ambulance Work.—A field hospital was established at Wright's farm and all the available ambulance and stretcher bearers were assembled at the foot of Spion Kop ready for action. Mr. Winston Spencer Churchill says that in ascending Spion Kop on the afternoon of 24th January he passed through the ambulance village. Every available stretcher belonging to every brigade was in use on Spion Kop.

It may be here observed that the casualties of Spion Kop itself were not so great as at Colenso, although, if the whole week's fighting is considered, they were greater.

Food.—The troops went up Spion Kop with one day's rations in hand, and during the day the regimental wagons were collected at the foot, within 600 feet of the summit. So that the troops on Spion Kop were quite as near their food as they had been at Three Tree Hill.

Ammunition.—Mr. Winston S. Churchill relates how he found a man dragging down a box of ammunition all by himself. There was

plenty of ammunition on the summit at sunset, and it was unfortunate that Lieut.-Colonel Thorneycroft did not ascertain this.

Sir Charles Warren, in his despatch of 1st February 1900 (Blue Book, p. 76), states that the Dorset Regiment carried down a large quantity of ammunition in the dark, which otherwise would have fallen into the hands of the enemy.

Water Supply.—Majors H. N. Sargent and E. J. Williams were in charge of the water supply, and their reports of 28th January have been published. The former says :

‘All the available pack mules which could be procured, viz. 25, were utilised in carrying biscuit tins filled with water up the hill, the tins being refilled from water carts placed at the foot of Spion Kop. Each tin contained $8\frac{1}{2}$ to 9 gallons of water. An officer was placed in charge of the water carts, and had a plentiful supply of spare tins, in addition to those carried by the mules. The mules were divided into two sections, each under an officer. These two sections of mules conveyed to the troops up the hill at each trip 425 gallons of water.

‘The water supply was kept going con-

tinuously during the day and late at night, with the exception of one break, caused by an order being given for one section of mules to bring up ammunition. In addition to the water conveyed on mules, there was a spring at the top of the hill under Royal Engineers' charge, which yielded a fair supply. I superintended generally the water supply myself, and made frequent inquiries as to whether the troops were getting sufficient quantity on top of the hill, and was told they were.'

Major Williams states that he took twelve mules with water to the trees near the top of the hill, arriving there about noon, and established a water depôt there; that the mules made a second trip, and were then taken for ammunition; that the Royal Engineers successfully dug for water at a place three quarters of the way up the hill, that it was thick but fairly plentiful; that from 3 P.M. to 8 P.M. he impressed more mules and continued to hurry up water to the water depôt, while men were also sent up with filled water bottles for distribution to the fighting line. At 8 P.M. it was too dark for the mules to work, and although several fell over the cliff in

getting up, there were at that time several full boxes of water at different spots on the hill. He also says that supplies of all kinds were plentiful at the foot of the hill.

Colonel A. W. Morris, Assistant Adjutant-General, who accompanied Major-General Coke up Spion Kop, saw the water depôt supply by the trees—some twenty tins of water. He says in his report of 28th January :

‘ Personally, I do not think the men were suffering very badly from want of water. I consider that under the circumstances nothing could have been better than the very difficult arrangements made for water supply : it was not plentiful, but sufficient for the purpose required.’

It seems clear from the above that there was a larger supply of water on Spion Kop than there was at any other hill action in Natal.

Guns.—Major-General Coke attempted to take up a machine gun, but unfortunately it overturned. The mountain guns, the only guns that Sir Redvers Buller could spare for the summit of Spion Kop, were, it is believed, at Frere ; at any rate, they were not in any way in Sir Charles Warren’s command and did not

arrive at the foot of Spion Kop until 7.30 p.m. and then the men required rest. Shortly before noon on the 24th Sir Redvers Buller offered to send over two naval guns from Potgieter's Drift, an offer which Sir Charles Warren accepted. They arrived at Spion Kop long after dark.

At 4 p.m. Sir Charles Warren sent Captain Hanwell, R.A., up Spion Kop to arrange about placing these naval guns, and had Lieut.-Colonel Thorneycroft been properly exercising command he should have learnt all about the guns from this officer. Slides were made in the morning in the hillside in case the naval guns should arrive, and 3-inch cable was got ready for hauling them up. These guns could have been got up, but even if they had been placed on the slopes they would have knocked out the pom-poms.

An Artillery officer, Lieutenant Dooner, was also on Spion Kop all day telegraphing information to the Officer Commanding Royal Artillery as to the effect of his fire.

Two guns of the 19th Battery Royal Field Artillery were ordered up the hill to the lower slopes, and had just started when they were met by the retiring force and turned back. Lord

Dundonald also had orders to take his machine gun up.

Engineer Operations.—These seem to have been very complete. Lieut.-Colonel Wood and his Staff Officer, Lieut.-Colonel Sim and his Staff Officer, and the 17th Company of Royal Engineers were engaged about Spion Kop all the time, and the 37th Company, sent from Potgieter's, arrived at midnight of 24th January.

During the 24th the whole of the picks, shovels, and sandbags in possession of the force were carried up to the summit of Spion Kop, and were there ready to be made use of at sundown. Colonel Hill knew where they were deposited; Lieut.-Colonel Thorneycroft apparently did not.

The 17th Company R.E. made the mule path and the gun slides, which were ready the one at noon, the others in the afternoon. This company and others were employed in developing the springs on the sides of Spion Kop, and also made a dam. In the afternoon a message was sent to the half of the 17th Company R.E. on the top of Spion Kop directing the officer in command to be ready to make entrenchments

there at nightfall, and Colonel Sim was ordered to go up with a working party of the Somersetshire Regiment.

It is not too much, then, to say that so far as Sir Charles Warren was concerned everything was ready, and action would have been taken during the night in regard to all the points mentioned by Sir Redvers Buller had not the retirement prevented it.

Sir Redvers Buller was therefore mistaken when he wrote, 'No arrangements were made.' Arrangements *were* made, as stated in Sir Charles Warren's despatch and corroborated from so many sources. It *was* known on the top of Spion Kop that the guns were to go up, but quite possibly Lieut.-Colonel Thorneycroft did not know it, as he did not place himself in a position to know anything but what was going on in the firing line, and at sundown, when everything should have been done and could have been done, he ordered the withdrawal.

And yet this is the one act which Sir Redvers Buller singles out for special commendation. Colonel Thorneycroft, he says, 'saved the situation' and 'exercised a wise discretion.'

Now, no one will withhold from this officer the praise due to his gallantry, but his determination to retire from Spion Kop, in spite of the 'No surrender' order sent to Colonel Crofton, in spite of the protests of Colonel Hill, in spite of the remonstrances of other officers, and in spite of the explicit orders of Sir Charles Warren conveyed to him on the way down by Colonel Sim, was not so much an error of judgment as an assumption of responsibility which, had it been a determination to advance in spite of orders, might perhaps have been justified by success, but as a determination to retire was perfectly unjustifiable and led to the abrupt termination of an enterprise which had been boldly commenced by the seizure of the key of the position, and which, in the opinion of Lord Roberts, ought to have succeeded.

If, then, the chief blame for this failure must lie upon the officer who ordered and carried out the retirement from Spion Kop, the officer in chief command, who assumed so detached a position in his orders and despatches, and yet so constantly interfered when he should have given his second-in-command a free hand, seems to be

rightly dealt with in the observations of Lord Roberts.

Had he furnished Sir Charles Warren with naval guns, with mountain guns, and with a balloon in time to be of use, and not on urgent request at the last moment; had he allowed Sir Charles Warren time to continue his bombardment and supplied him with longer-ranging guns, instead of urging him to attack on the threat of withdrawing the force; had he even, after the decision to attack Spion Kop, at once sent over the naval 12-prs. and another company of Royal Engineers to help to get them up at sundown, the story might have been different. But he did none of these things. He only appointed an inexperienced young officer to take command at the top of Spion Kop over all his seniors, and thinks that officer saved the situation by the wise discretion he exercised in abandoning the position he was chosen to defend.

If the memorandum 'not necessarily for publication' recently published does not, to our mind, add much to the blame Sir Redvers Buller had already thrown upon Sir Charles Warren, it certainly puts more definitely the opinion the

senior had formed of his junior, and, in this light, should not have been concealed from the latter for two years; but, on the other hand, the memorandum tends to lessen our already waning confidence in Sir Redvers Buller.

The same sort of inconsistencies run through it that we have noticed in the despatches. Thus he says: 'On the 19th he (Sir Charles Warren) attacked and gained a considerable advantage. On the 20th, instead of pursuing it, he divided his force and gave Clery a separate command.' But there is no sort of agreement between this statement and the telegram he sent at 9.15 P.M. on the 20th, wherein he relates how Clery by judicious use of his artillery had fought his way up, capturing ridge after ridge for about three miles, and the troops were bivouacking on the ground he had gained.

So in the next sentence of the memorandum: 'On the 21st I find that his (Warren's) right was in advance of his left, and that the whole of his batteries, six, were crowded on one small position on his right, while his left was unprotected by artillery, and I had come out to tell him that the enemy on that flank had

received a reinforcement of at least 2,500. I suggested a better distribution of his batteries, which he agreed to to some extent, but he would not advance his left.' How is it possible to reconcile this statement with his telegram of 21st January, in which he said: 'Warren has been engaged all day, chiefly on his left, which he has swung round about a couple of miles. The ground is very difficult, and, as the fighting is all the time up-hill, it is difficult exactly to say how much we gain, but I think we are making substantial progress'?

Finally his memorandum says: 'On the 19th I ought to have assumed command myself; I saw that things were not going well—indeed, every one saw that. I blame myself now for not having done so.' It was on the 19th that Warren made his flank march to Venter's Laager, that he occupied the lower slopes of the Rangeworthy Hills, and that he reported the result of his reconnaissances. What was not going well? He had not been attacked, happily, in his flank march, he had decided that the road by Fair View to Groote Hoek must be the route—and, as we understand, Sir Redvers Buller says

there can be no question that was the only route—and he had captured positions on the hills. Only a few paragraphs before in this same memorandum Sir Redvers Buller says that on the 19th Sir Charles Warren attacked and gained a considerable advantage. Is a considerable advantage indicative of things not going well? Instances of these apparent contradictions and inconsistencies in the actions, telegrams, and despatches of Sir Redvers Buller could be multiplied. What does it all mean? Why this sudden change of bearing towards his principal General? We cannot say; but there is the painful fact that after the abandonment of Spion Kop by the commander nominated by Sir Redvers Buller this change of attitude is evident on comparing the telegrams with the despatches.

In conclusion, whatever faults Sir Charles Warren may have exhibited, we can only say that the accusations made against him, and of which for months he was kept in ignorance, do not stand the investigation we have given them.

It has been stated in Parliament that in

August 1900 Sir Charles Warren, on his return home, wrote his own answer to the accusations, of which he was then aware from the published despatches. Since then the Government has been worried by Sir Redvers Buller into publishing further accusations against Sir Charles Warren, who tells us, in his recent letter to the newspapers, that he has asked the Government in common justice to give his refutation the same publicity. At present the Government has decided not to publish it, in order that the personal controversy involved between two distinguished Generals may not be prolonged. But is this quite fair to Sir Charles Warren? Having made public all that is to be said against him, might he not be allowed to show that he can justify himself?

APPENDIX

*EXTRACTS FROM DESPATCHES*¹

A

FROM FIELD-MARSHAL LORD ROBERTS TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WAR

Army Headquarters, South Africa, Camp,
Dekiel Drift, Riet River : 13th February, 1900.

My Lord,—I have the honour to submit, for your Lordship's information, despatches from General Sir Redvers Buller, describing the advance across the Tugela River on the 17th and 18th January, 1900, and the capture and evacuation of the Spion Kop position on the 23rd and 24th January, as well as certain minor operations between the 19th and 24th January on the right or eastern line of advance.

2. The plan of operations is not very clearly described in the despatches themselves, but it may be gathered from them and the accompanying documents themselves that the original intention was to cross the Tugela at or near Trichard's Drift, and thence by

¹ N.B.—Black marginal line indicates that portions so marked were not published with the despatches, 1900.

following the road past 'Fair View' and 'Acton Homes,' to gain the open plain north of Spion Kop, the Boer position in front of Potgieter's Drift being too strong to be taken by direct attack. The whole force, less one brigade, was placed under the orders of Sir Charles Warren, who, the day after he had crossed the Tugela, seems to have consulted his General and principal Staff Officers, and to have come to the conclusion that the flanking movement which Sir Redvers Buller had mentioned in his secret instructions was impracticable on account of the insufficiency of supplies. He accordingly decided to advance by the more direct road leading north-east, and branching off from a point east of 'Three Tree Hill.' The selection of this road necessitated the capture and retention of Spion Kop, but whether it would have been equally necessary to occupy Spion Kop, had the line of advance indicated by Sir Redvers Buller been followed, is not stated in the correspondence. As Sir Charles Warren considered it impossible to make the wide flanking movement which was recommended, if not actually prescribed, in his secret instructions, he should at once have acquainted Sir Redvers Buller with the course of action which he proposed to adopt. There is nothing to show whether he did so or not, but it seems only fair to Sir Charles Warren to point out that Sir Redvers Buller appears throughout to have been aware of what was happening. On several occasions he was present during the operations. He repeatedly gave advice to his subordinate commander, and on the day after the withdrawal from Spion Kop he resumed the chief command.

3. In his note¹ on Sir Charles Warren's report, accompanying despatch of 30th January 1900,² Sir Redvers Buller expresses a very adverse opinion on the manner in which Sir Charles Warren carried out the instructions he had received. Without a knowledge of the country and circumstances it is difficult to say whether the delay, misdirection, and want of control, of which Sir Redvers Buller complains, were altogether avoidable ; but, in any case, if he considered that his orders were not being properly given effect to, it appears to me that it was his duty to intervene as soon as he had reason to believe that the success of the operations was being endangered. This, indeed, is admitted by Sir Redvers Buller himself, whose explanation of his non-interference can hardly be accepted as adequate. A most important enterprise was being attempted, and no personal considerations should have deterred the officer in chief command from insisting on its being conducted in the manner which, in his opinion, would lead to the attainment of the object in view, with the least possible loss on our side.

As regards the withdrawal of the troops from the Spion Kop position, which, though occupied almost without opposition in the early morning of the 24th January, had to be held throughout the day under an extremely heavy fire, and the retention of which had become essential to the relief of Ladysmith, I regret that I am unable to concur with Sir Redvers Buller in thinking that Lieut.-Colonel Thorneycroft exercised a wise discretion in ordering the troops to retire. Even

¹ See D.

² See C.

admitting that due preparations may not have been made for strengthening the position during the night, reorganising the defence, and bringing up artillery—in regard to which Sir Charles Warren's report does not altogether bear out Sir Redvers Buller's contention—admitting also that the senior officers on the summit of the hill might have been more promptly informed of the measures taken by Sir Charles Warren to support and reinforce them, I am of opinion that Lieut.-Colonel Thorneycroft's assumption of responsibility and authority was wholly inexcusable. During the night the enemy's fire, if it did not cease altogether, could not have been formidable, and, though lamp signalling was not possible at the time, owing to the supply of oil having failed, it would not have taken more than two or three hours at most for Lieut.-Colonel Thorneycroft to communicate by messenger with Major-General Coke or Sir Charles Warren, and to receive a reply. Major-General Coke appears to have left Spion Kop at 9.30 P.M. for the purpose of consulting with Sir Charles Warren, and up to that hour the idea of a withdrawal had not been entertained. Yet almost immediately after Major-General Coke's departure Lieut.-Colonel Thorneycroft issued an order, without reference to superior authority, which upset the whole plan of operations, and rendered unavailing the sacrifices which had already been made to carry it into effect.

On the other hand, it is only right to state that Lieut.-Colonel Thorneycroft appears to have behaved in a very gallant manner throughout the day, and it was doubtless due, in a great measure, to his exertions

and example that the troops continued to hold the summit of the hill until directed to retire.

5. The conduct of Captain Phillips, Brigade-Major of the 10th Brigade, on the occasion in question, is deserving of high commendation. He did his best to rectify the mistake which was being made, but it was too late. Signalling communication was not re-established until 2.30 A.M. on the 25th January, and by that time the naval guns could not have reached the summit of the hill before daybreak. Major-General Coke did not return, and Lieut.-Colonel Thorneycroft had gone away. Moreover, most of the troops had begun to leave the hill, and the working parties, with the half company of Royal Engineers, had also withdrawn.

6. It is to be regretted that Sir Charles Warren did not himself visit Spion Kop during the afternoon or evening, knowing as he did that the state of affairs there was very critical, and that the loss of the position would involve the failure of the operations. He was, consequently, obliged to summon Major-General Coke to his headquarters in the evening in order that he might ascertain how matters were going on, and the command on Spion Kop thus devolved on Lieut.-Colonel Thorneycroft; but Major-General Coke was not aware of this. About midday, under instructions from Sir Redvers Buller, Sir Charles Warren had directed Lieut.-Colonel Thorneycroft to assume command on the summit of the hill, with the temporary rank of Brigadier-General, but this order was not communicated to Major-General Coke, who, until he left the position at 9.30 P.M., was under the impression

that the command had devolved on Colonel Hill, as senior officer, after Colonel Crofton had been wounded. Omissions or mistakes of this nature may be trivial in themselves, yet may exercise an important influence on the course of events; and I think that Sir Redvers Buller is justified in remarking that ‘there was a want of organisation and system which acted most unfavourably on the defence.’

7. The attempt to relieve Ladysmith, described in these despatches, was well devised, and I agree with Sir Redvers Buller in thinking that it ought to have succeeded. That it failed may, in some measure, be due to the difficulties of the ground and the commanding positions held by the enemy—probably also to errors of judgment and want of administrative capacity on the part of Sir Charles Warren. But whatever faults Sir Charles Warren may have committed, the failure must also be ascribed to the disinclination of the officer in supreme command to assert his authority and see that what he thought best was done, and also to the unwarrantable and needless assumption of responsibility by a subordinate officer.

8. The gratifying feature in these despatches is the admirable behaviour of the troops throughout the operations.

I have the honour to be, My Lord,

Your Lordship’s most obedient Servant,

ROBERTS, *Field-Marshal*,
Commanding-in-Chief, South Africa.

B

FROM GENERAL SIR REDVERS BULLER TO THE
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WAR.

*(Through Field-Marshal Lord Roberts, G.C.B.,
Commander-in-Chief, Cape Town.)*

Spearman's Hill: 30th January, 1900.

Sir,—I have the honour to report that General Sir Charles Warren's Division having arrived at Estcourt, less two battalions, 10th Brigade, which were left at the Cape, by the 7th January, it moved to Frere on the 9th.

I attach a copy of Natal Army Orders of the 8th January,¹ giving full particulars of the intended move and organisation of the force.

The column moved as ordered, but torrents of rain fell on the 9th, which filled all the spruits, and, indeed, rendered many of them impassable for many hours. To forward supply alone took 650 ox wagons, and as in the 16 miles from Frere to Springfield there were three places at which all the wagons had to be double spanned, and some required three spans, some idea may be formed of the difficulties, but these were all successfully overcome by the willing labours of the troops. I attach a statement of the supply trains.

The 4th Brigade reached Springfield on the 12th, in support of the mounted troops who had surprised and seized the important position of Spearman's Hill, commanding Potgieter's Drift, on the 11th.

By the 13th all troops were at Springfield and Spearman's Hill, and supply was well forward.

¹ See pages 62 to 66.

On the 16th, a reserve of 17 days' supply having been collected, General Sir C. Warren, in command of the 2nd Division, the 11th Brigade of the 5th Division, the Brigade Division Royal Field Artillery, 5th Division, and certain corps troops, including the Mounted Brigade, moved from Springfield to Trichard's Drift, which is about six miles west of Potgieter's.

I attach a copy of the orders¹ under which Sir C. Warren acted, and enclose his report of his operations (C).

On the night of the 23rd, General Warren attacked Spion Kop, which operation he has made the subject of a special report. On the morning of the 25th, finding that Spion Kop had been abandoned in the night, I decided to withdraw General Warren's force; the troops had been continuously engaged for a week, in circumstances entailing considerable hardships, there had been very heavy losses on Spion Kop. General Warren's dispositions had mixed up all the brigades, and the positions he held were dangerously insecure. I consequently assumed the command, commenced the withdrawal of the ox and heavy mule transport on the 25th; this was completed by midday the 26th; by double spanning the loaded ox wagons got over the drift at the rate of about eight per hour. The mule wagons went over the pontoon bridge, but all the mules had to be taken out and the vehicles passed over by hand. For about seven hours of the night the drift could not be used as it was dangerous in the dark, but the use of the pontoon went on day and night. In addition to machine guns, six batteries of Royal Field Artillery, and four howitzers, the following

¹ See pages 67 to 69.

vehicles were passed: ox wagons, 232; 10-span mule wagons, 98; 6-span, 107; 4-span, 52; total, 489 vehicles. In addition to these, the ambulances were working backwards and forwards evacuating the sick and wounded.

By 2 P.M., the 26th, all the ox wagons were over, and by 11.30 P.M. all the mule transports were across and the bridge clear for the troops. By 4 A.M., the 27th, all the troops were over, and by 8 A.M. the pontoons were gone and all was clear. The troops had all reached their new camps by 10 A.M. The marches averaged for the mounted troops about 7 miles, and for the infantry and artillery an average of 5 miles.

Everything worked without a hitch, and the arrangements reflected great credit on the Staff of all degrees; but I must especially mention Major Irwin, R.E., and his men of the Pontoon Troop, who were untiring. When all men were over, the chasses of the pontoon bridge were so worn by the traffic that I do not think they would have lasted another half hour.

Thus ended an expedition which I think ought to have succeeded. We have suffered heavily (for casualty return, *see* K), very heavy losses, and lost many whom we can ill spare; but, on the other hand, we have inflicted as great or greater losses upon the enemy than they have upon us, and they are, by all accounts, thoroughly disheartened; while our troops are, I am glad and proud to say, in excellent fettle.

I have the honour to be, Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

REDVERS BULLER,

General Officer Commanding.

C

FROM LIEUT.-GENERAL SIR CHARLES WARREN TO
THE CHIEF OF THE STAFF

Hatting's Farm: 29th January, 1900.

Sir,—I have the honour to make the following report on the operations on the north side of the Tugela, west of Spion Kop, from the 17th to the 27th of January, 1900:—

1. On the 8th January field orders were published constituting the 10th Brigade of the 5th Division a Corps Brigade, and placing the 4th Brigade in the 5th Division. The 5th Division thus constituted marched from Frere on the 10th instant, arriving at Springfield on the 12th instant.

2. On the 15th January I received your secret instructions to command a force to proceed across the Tugela, near Trichardt's Drift, to the west of Spion Kop, recommending me to proceed forward refusing my right (namely, Spion Kop), and bringing my left forward to gain the open plain north of Spion Kop. This move was to commence as soon as supplies were all in, and the 10th Brigade (except two companies) removed from Springfield Bridge to Spearman's Hill.

3. I was provided with 4 days' rations, with which I was to cross the Tugela, fight my way round to north of Spion Kop, and join your column opposite Potgieter's.

4. On the 15th January I made the arrangements for getting supplies, and moved the 10th Brigade on the following day; and on the evening of the 16th

January I left Springfield with a force under my command, which amounted to an Army Corps (less one brigade), and by a night march arrived at Trichardt's Drift, and took possession of the hills on the south side of the Tugela.

5. On the 17th January I threw pontoon bridges across the Tugela, passed the infantry across by ponts, and captured the hills immediately commanding the drift on the north side with two brigades commanded by Generals Woodgate and Hart. The Commander-in-Chief was present during part of the day, and gave some verbal directions to General Woodgate.

The Mounted Brigade passed over principally by the drift, and went over the country as far as Acton Homes, and on the following day (18th) had a successful action with a small party of Boers, bringing in 31 prisoners.

During the night of the 17th, and day of the 18th, the whole of the wagons belonging to the force were brought across the Tugela, and the artillery were in position outside of Wright's Farm.

6. On the 19th two brigades advanced, occupying the slopes of the adjoining hills on the right, and the wagons were successfully brought to Venter's Spruit.

In the evening, after having examined the possible roads by which we could proceed, I assembled the General Officers and the Staff, and the Officer Commanding Royal Artillery, and Commanding Royal Engineer, and pointed out to them that of the two roads by which we could advance the eastern one, by Acton Homes, must be rejected, because time would not allow of it, and with this all concurred. I then

pointed out that the only possible way of all getting through by the road north of Fair View would be by taking 3 or 4 days' food in our haversacks, and sending all our wagons back across the Tugela; but before we could do this we must capture the position in front of us.

7. On the following day, 20th January, I placed two brigades and six batteries of artillery at the disposal of General Sir C. F. Clery, with instructions to attack the Boer positions by a series of outflanking movements (copy of instructions herewith¹), and by the end of the day, after fighting for 12 hours, we were in possession of the whole part of hills, but found a strongly entrenched line on the comparatively flat country beyond us.

8. On the 21st the Boers displayed considerable activity on our left, and the Commander-in-Chief desired me to move two batteries from right to left. At a subsequent date, during the day, I found it impossible to proceed without howitzers, and telegraphed for four from Potgieter's. These arrived early on the morning of the 22nd, and the Commander-in-Chief, arriving about the same time, directed me to place two of these howitzers on the left, two having already been placed on the right flank. I pointed out to the Commander-in-Chief that it would be impossible to get wagons through by the road leading past Fair View unless we first took Spion Kop, which lies within about 2,000 yards of the road. The Commander-in-Chief agreed that Spion Kop would have to be taken. Accordingly that evening orders were

¹ See page 103.

drawn up giving the necessary instructions to General Talbot Coke to take Spion Kop that night, but, owing to an absence of sufficient reconnaissance, he requested that the attack might be put off for a day.¹

9. On the 23rd January the Commander-in-Chief came into camp, the attack on Spion Kop was decided upon, and Lieut.-Colonel àCourt, of the Headquarters Staff, was directed by the Commander-in-Chief to accompany General Woodgate, who was detailed to command the attacking column. The account of the capture of Spion Kop is given in another report.

10. On the morning of the 25th January the Com-

Hatting's Farm : 30th January, 1900.

¹ The Chief of Staff,—With reference to my report on the operations on the Tugela, already forwarded, will you please attach the accompanying addition ?

C. WARREN, *Lieut.-General*,
Commanding 5th Division.

Hatting's Farm : 30th January, 1900.

I omitted to state that during the afternoon of the 22nd the Commander-in-Chief proposed an attack upon the enemy's position on our left flank that night. I summoned at once the General Officers available—namely, Generals Clery, Talbot Coke, and Hildyard. General Clery, who was in command of the left attack, did not consider it advisable to make this attack, because, if successful, it would commit us to taking the whole line of the enemy's position, which he considered a hazardous proceeding, as we might not be able to hold it. In this I concurred, more particularly as it was evidently too late in the day to carry the operation out effectively.

C. WARREN, *Lieut.-General*,
Commanding 5th Division.

I continually proposed to General Warren that he should attack the enemy's right, which was *en l'air* and not strong, and which it was part of the original programme to try and turn, but I never suggested doing this hurriedly or without adequate forethought and preparation.—R. B.

mander-in-Chief arrived, decided to retire the force, and assumed direct command. The whole of the wagons of the 5th Division were got down to the drift during the day, and were crossed over before 2 P.M. on the 26th January.

11. The arrangements for the retirement of the 5th Division were exceedingly well got out, and the retirement was made in good order during the night of the 26th, the whole of the troops crossing to the south side of the Tugela before daylight, and the wagons were packed, and the troops bivouacked near the spruit about 2 miles to the east of the pontoon bridges. About 10 P.M., previous to the retirement, heavy musketry was heard to the north of our position, which has been attributed to a Boer commando thinking we were going to make a night attack.

12. I append reports ¹ from Lieut.-General Sir C. F. Clery, K.C.B., on the operations conducted by him on the 20th, 21st, and 22nd, also from Major-General Hildyard, C.B., for his operations on those dates.

13. I propose to forward as soon as possible a more detailed report of the movements of brigades and units, and acts of individuals.

C. WARREN, *Lieut.-General,*
Commanding 5th Division.

¹ See pages 104 and 105 for substance of Sir C. F. Clery's Report. The Report of Major-General Hildyard is not reprinted.

D

SIR REDVERS BULLER'S MEMORANDUM 'NOT
NECESSARILY FOR PUBLICATION.'

Spearman's Camp: 30th January, 1900.

Secretary of State,—In forwarding this report¹ I am constrained to make the following remarks, not necessarily for publication :

I had fully discussed my orders with General Warren before he started, and he appeared entirely to agree that the policy indicated of refusing the right and advancing the left was the right one. He never, though, attempted to carry it out. From the first there could be no question but that the only practicable road for his column was the one by Fair View. The problem was to get rid of the enemy who were holding it.

The arrival of the force at Trichard's was a surprise to the enemy, who were not in strength. Sir C. Warren, instead of feeling for the enemy, elected to spend two whole days in passing his baggage. During this time the enemy received reinforcements and strengthened his position. On the 19th he attacked and gained a considerable advantage. On the 20th, instead of pursuing it, he divided his force, and gave General Clery a separate command.

On the 21st I find that his right was in advance of his left, and that the whole of his batteries, six, were crowded on one small position on his right, while his left was unprotected by artillery, and I had come out to tell him that the enemy on that flank had received a reinforcement of at least 2,500. I suggested a better

distribution of his batteries, which he agreed to, to some extent, but he would not advance his left, and I found that he had divided his fighting line into three independent commands, independent of each other and apparently independent of him, as he told me he could not move any batteries without General Clery's consent.

The days went on. I saw no attempt on the part of General Warren either to grapple with the situation or to command his force himself. By the 23rd I calculated that the enemy, who were about 600 strong on the 16th, were not less than 15,000, and General White confirmed this estimate. We had really lost our chance by Sir C. Warren's slowness. He seems to me a man who can do well what he can do himself, but who cannot command, as he can use neither his Staff nor subordinates. I can never employ him again on an independent command.

On the 19th I ought to have assumed command myself; I saw that things were not going well—indeed, every one saw that. I blame myself now for not having done so. I did not, because I thought that if I did I should discredit General Warren in the estimation of the troops; and that if I were shot, and he had to withdraw across the Tugela, and they had lost confidence in him, the consequences might be very serious.

I must leave it to higher authority whether this argument was a sound one. Anyhow, I feel convinced that we had a good chance on the 17th, and that we lost it.

REDVERS BULLER, *General*.

E

FROM THE GENERAL OFFICER COMMANDING, NATAL,
TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WAR

(By the Field-Marshal Commanding-in-Chief, Cape Town)

Spearman's Hill: 30th January, 1900.

Sir,—In forwarding Lieut.-General Sir C. Warren's report on the capture and evacuation of Spion Kop, I have the honour to offer the following observations. The figures in my report refer to those in margin:—

1. Sir C. Warren is hardly correct in saying that he was only allowed $3\frac{1}{2}$ days' provisions. I had told him that transport for $3\frac{1}{2}$ days would be sufficient burden to him, but that I would keep him filled up as he wanted it. That he was aware of this is shown by the following telegram which he sent on the day in question. It is the only report I had from Sir C. Warren:—

(Sent 7.54 P.M. Received 8.15 A.M.)

‘Left Flank: 19th January.

‘To Chief of the Staff,—I find there are only two roads by which we could possibly get from Trichard's Drift to Potgieter's, on the north of the Tugela—one by Acton Homes, the other by Fair View and Rosalie; the first I reject as too long, the second is a very difficult road for a large number of wagons, unless the enemy is thoroughly cleared out. I am, therefore, going to adopt some special arrangements which will involve my stay at Venter's Laager for 2 or 3 days. I will send in for further supplies and report progress.

‘C. WARREN.’

The reply to this was that 3 days' supply was being sent.

2. I went over to Sir C. Warren on the 23rd. I pointed out to him that I had no further report and no intimation of the special arrangements foreshadowed by this telegram of the 19th; that for four days he had kept his men continuously exposed to shell and rifle fire, perched on the edge of an almost precipitous hill; that the position admitted of no second line, and the supports were massed close behind the firing line in indefensible formations, and that a panic or a sudden charge might send the whole lot in disorder down the hill at any moment. I said it was too dangerous a situation to be prolonged, and that he must either attack or I should withdraw his force. I advocated, as I had previously done, an advance from his left. He said that he had the night before ordered General Coke to assault Spion Kop, but the latter had objected to undertaking a night attack on a position the road to which he had not reconnoitred, and added that he intended to assault Spion Kop that night.

3. I suggested that as General Coke was still lame from the effects of a lately broken leg, General Woodgate, who had two sound legs, was better adapted for mountain climbing.

4. As no heliograph could, on account of the fire, be kept on the east side of Spion Kop, messages for Sir C. Warren were received by our signallers at Spearman, and telegraphed to Sir C. Warren; thus I saw them before he did, as I was at the signal station. The telegram Sir C. Warren quotes did not give me

confidence in its sender, and, at the moment, I could see that our men on the top had given way, and that efforts were being made to rally them. I telegraphed to Sir C. Warren : ‘ Unless you put some really good hard-fighting man in command on the top you will lose the hill. I suggest Thorneycroft.’

5. This is a mistake. *See A* in Sir C. Warren’s report. Colonel àCourt was sent down by General Woodgate almost as soon as he gained the summit.

6. I have not thought it necessary to order any investigation. If at sundown the defence of the summit had been taken regularly in hand, entrenchments laid out, gun emplacements prepared, the dead removed, the wounded collected, and, in fact, the whole place brought under regular military command, and careful arrangements made for the supply of water and food to the scattered fighting line, the hills would have been held, I am sure.

7. But no arrangements were made. General Coke appears to have been ordered away just as he would have been useful, and no one succeeded him ; those on the top were ignorant of the fact that guns were coming up, and generally there was a want of organisation and system that acted most unfavourably on the defence.

It is admitted by all that Colonel Thorneycroft acted with the greatest gallantry throughout the day, and really saved the situation. Preparations for the second day’s defence should have been organised during the day, and have been commenced at nightfall.

As this was not done, I think Colonel Thorneycroft exercised a wise discretion.

Our losses, I regret to say, were very heavy, but the enemy admitted to our doctors that theirs were equally severe, and though we were not successful in retaining the position, the losses inflicted on the enemy and the attack generally have had a marked effect upon them.

I cannot close these remarks without bearing testimony to the gallant and admirable behaviour of the troops: the endurance shown by the Lancashire Fusiliers, the Middlesex Regiment, and Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry was admirable, while the efforts of the 2nd Battalion Scottish Rifles and 3rd Battalion King's Royal Rifles were equally good, and the Royal Lancasters fought gallantly.

I am writing to catch the mail, and have not any particulars yet to enable me to report more fully on details.

I have the honour to be, Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

REDVERS BULLER.

F

REPORT BY LIEUT.-GENERAL SIR CHARLES WARREN, K.C.B., UPON THE CAPTURE AND SUBSEQUENT EVACUATION OF SPION KOP

Capture and Evacuation of Spion Kop

Chief of the Staff,—I make the operations against Spion Kop in a separate report, because they did not enter into my original plans.

Under the original instructions of the General

Officer Commanding-in-Chief, of 15th January, 1900, I was to act as circumstances required, but, according to instructions, was generally to continue throughout refusing my right, and throwing my left forward until I gained the open plain north of Spion Kop.

Upon the 19th of January, on arrival at Venter's Laager, I assembled all the General Officers, Officers Commanding Royal Artillery and Royal Engineers of Divisions, and Staff Officers together. I pointed out to them that, with the three and a-half ($3\frac{1}{2}$) days' ¹ provisions allowed, it was impossible to advance by the left road through Acton Homes. In this they unanimously concurred. I showed them that the only possible road was that going over Fair View through Rosalie, but I expressed my conviction that this could ¹ not be done unless we sent the whole of our transport back across the Tugela, and attempted to march through with our rations in our haversacks—without impedimenta.

The hills were cleared on the following day, and very strong entrenchments found behind them. The Commander-in-Chief was present on the 21st and 22nd January, and I pointed out the difficulties of marching along the road, accompanied by wagons, without first taking Spion Kop.

Accordingly, on the night of the 22nd, I ordered General Coke to occupy Spion Kop. He, however, desired that the occupation might be deferred for a day in order that he might make a reconnaissance with the Officers Commanding battalions to be sent there.

On the 23rd January the Commander-in-Chief ² came into camp, and told me that there were two

courses open—(1) to attack, or (2) to retire. I replied that I should prefer to attack Spion Kop to retiring, and showed the Commander-in-Chief my orders of the previous day.

- 3 The Commander-in-Chief then desired that I should put General Woodgate in command of the expedition, and detailed Lieut.-Colonel àCourt to accompany him as Staff Officer.

The same evening General Woodgate proceeded with the Lancashire Fusiliers, the Royal Lancaster Regiment, a portion of Thorneycroft's Horse, and half company Royal Engineers, supported by two companies of the Connaught Rangers and by the Imperial Light Infantry, the latter having just arrived by Trichardt's Drift.

The attack and capture of Spion Kop was entirely successful. General Woodgate, having secured the summit on the 24th, reported that he had entrenched a position and hoped he was secure, but that the fog was too thick to permit him to see. The position was rushed without casualties, other than three men wounded.

- A Lieut.-Colonel àCourt came down in the morning and stated that everything was satisfactory and secure, and telegraphed to the Commander-in-Chief to that effect. Scarcely had he started on his return to headquarters when a heliogram arrived from Colonel Crofton (Royal Lancaster). The message was: 'Reinforce at once, or all lost. General dead.'

He also sent a similar message to headquarters. I immediately ordered General Coke to proceed to his assistance, and to take command of the troops. He

started at once, and was accompanied by the Middlesex and Dorsetshire Regiments.

I replied to Colonel Crofton: 'I am sending two battalions, and the Imperial Light Infantry are on their way up. You must hold on to the last. No surrender.'

This occurred about 10 A.M.

Shortly afterwards I received a telegram from the 4 Commander-in-Chief, ordering me to appoint Lieut.-Colonel Thorneycroft to the command of the summit. I accordingly had heliographed: 'With the approval of the Commander-in-Chief, I place Lieut.-Colonel Thorneycroft in command of the summit, with the local rank of Brigadier-General.'

For some hours after this message I could get no information from the summit. It appears that the signallers and their apparatus were destroyed by the heavy fire.

I repeatedly asked for Colonel Thorneycroft to state his view of the situation. At 1.20 P.M. I heliographed to ascertain whether Colonel Thorneycroft had assumed command, and at the same time asked General Coke to give me his views on the situation on Spion Kop. Still getting no reply, I asked whether General Coke was there, and subsequently received his view of the situation (copy attached). He stated that, unless the artillery could silence the enemy's guns, the men on the summit could not stand another complete day's shelling, and that the situation was extremely critical.

At 6.30 P.M. I asked if he could keep two battalions on the summit, removing the remainder out of reach of

shells; also whether two battalions would suffice to hold the summit. This was in accordance with a telegram on the subject sent me by the Commander-in-Chief. Later in the evening I made arrangements to send two (naval) 12-prs. and the Mountain Battery Royal Artillery to the summit, together with half company Royal Engineers (and working parties, two reliefs of 600 men each), to strengthen the entrenchments and provide shell covers for the men. I may here mention that the 17th Company Royal Engineers proceeded at the same time as General Woodgate's force, and were employed until daylight upon the entrenchments, then upon road making and water supply.

Sandbags were sent up early on the 24th instant.

While Colonel Sim was, with this party, ascending the hill, he met Colonel Thorneycroft descending, having evacuated the position. For the remainder of the account of the proceedings I attach the reports made to me by Colonel Thorneycroft¹ and by General Coke,² together with reports on the supply of food and water rendered by officers thus engaged. The supply of ammunition was ample.

I wish to bring to notice that I heard from all but one expression of the admirable conduct and bravery shown by officers and men suffering under a withering artillery fire on the summit of the slopes, and also of those who, with so much endurance, persisted in carrying up water and food and ammunition to the troops during this day.

⁵ During the day a Staff Officer of the Headquarters

¹ See G.

² See H.

Staff was present on the summit, and reported direct to the Commander-in-Chief.

At sunset I considered that the position could be held next day, provided that guns could be mounted and effective shelter provided. Both of these conditions were about to be fulfilled, as already mentioned.

In the absence of General Coke, whom I ordered to come to report in person as to the situation, the evacuation took place under orders, given upon his own responsibility, by Lieut.-Colonel Thorneycroft. This occurred in the face of the vigorous protests of General Coke's Brigade-Major, the Officer Commanding the Middlesex Regiment, and others.

It is a matter for the Commander-in-Chief to decide ⁶ whether there should be an investigation into the question of the unauthorised evacuation of Spion Kop.

CHARLES WARREN, *Lieut.-General*.

G

FROM LIEUT.-COLONEL A. W. THORNEYCROFT,
THORNEYCROFT'S MOUNTED INFANTRY, COMMAND-
ING ON SPION KOP, TO THE CHIEF STAFF OFFICER
TO GENERAL SIR C. WARREN.

Camp, Trichard's Drift: 26th January, 1900.

SIR,—On the night of the 23rd January, 1900, I rendezvoused with 18 Officers and 180 men, Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry, 2nd Bat. Lancashire Fusiliers, 2nd Bat. Royal Lancaster Regiment, and half company Royal Engineers, the whole under the command of General Woodgate. At 9 P.M. we started to march to

the top of Spion Kop. I led the way with a small advanced party, crossed the dongas and advanced up the hill; on reaching the first plateau the force closed up in formation, and went on again. As the front broadened I got the Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry into line, right across the hill, and the remainder followed in successive lines up the last slope, when we were suddenly challenged. I had ordered the men to lie down when challenged; they did so. The Boers opened fire from magazines. When I thought that they had emptied their magazines I gave the order to charge; an officer on my left gave the order to charge also, and the whole line advanced at the double and carried the crest line at 4 A.M., when I halted and reformed the line. There were about ten men wounded altogether. Orders were immediately given by General Officer Commanding to form a trench and breastwork. There was a mist on the hill, and in the darkness and mist it was difficult to get the exact crest line for a good field of fire, and the boulders made it difficult to dig, but we made a rough trench and breastwork. At 4.30 a few Boers came up and began firing. The men lined the trench, but the picquets in front replied to the fire, and firing ceased for a time. The Boers then returned with strong reinforcements from their camp, which lay concealed in a hollow on the side of the hill, and which was obscured in the mist; we sent out men in front to enable them to get a better field of fire; with two lulls in the firing the mist rose about 8 A.M., when the rifle fire on both sides became heavy and the Boers opened fire from three guns and a Maxim-Nordenfelt. The shrapnel fire was very

accurate and burst well, sweeping the whole plateau. General Woodgate was wounded early in the action and Colonel Blomfield assumed command, but he, too, was wounded. At this time I was directing the movements of the Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry, and sent out reinforcements to the firing line which was in advance of the trench; word was sent to me that General Sir C. Warren had heliographed that I was to assume command. I sent out more men to the flanks as the Boers were working round, and the replacing of casualties gradually absorbed all the men of the force. The firing became hotter on both sides, the Boers gradually advancing; twice the men charged out from the entrenchments in the centre and kept them back, but at length the entrenchment became the firing line in the centre (the left maintained their advanced position).

The Boers closed in on the right and centre. Some men of mixed regiments at right end of trench got up and put up their hands; three or four Boers came out and signalled their comrades to advance. I was the only officer in the trench on the left, and I got up and shouted to the leader of the Boers that I was the Commandant and that there was no surrender.

In order not to get mixed up in any discussion I called on all men to follow me, and retired to some rocks further back. The Boers opened a heavy fire on us. On reaching the rocks I saw a company of the Middlesex Regiment advancing, I collected them up to the rocks, and ordered all to advance again. This the men did, and we re-occupied the trench and crest line in front.

As the companies of the Middlesex arrived I pushed them on to reinforce, and was able to hold the whole line again. The men on the left of our defence, who were detached at some distance from the trench, had held their ground. The Imperial Light Infantry reinforced this part. The Boers then made a desperate endeavour to shell us out of the position, and the fire caused many casualties. The Scottish Rifles came up, and I pushed them up to the right and left flanks as they arrived. There was some discussion at this time as to who was in command, and the Officer Commanding Scottish Rifles said he would go and see General Talbot Coke, who was reported to be at the foot of the hill, to get orders. Up to this I had issued the orders, but as I only got a verbal message I did not understand that I had the temporary rank of Brigadier-General. I continued to direct operations while the Officer Commanding Scottish Rifles went to see General Talbot Coke. General Coke said that Colonel Hill was in command, but I could not find him. The heavy fire continued, and the Boers brought a gun and Maxim-Nordenfelt to bear on us from the east, thus sweeping the plateau from the east, north, and north-west, and enfilading our trenches. The men held on all along the line, notwithstanding the terrific fire which was brought to bear on them, as the enemy's guns (which now numbered five and two Nordenfelts) were absolutely unmolested. When night began to close in I determined to take some steps, and a consultation was held. The Officer Commanding Scottish Rifles and Colonel Crofton were both of opinion that the hill was untenable. I entirely agreed with their view, and so I gave the order for the troops to with-

draw on to the neck and ridge where the hospital was. It was now quite dark, and we went out to warn all to come in. The enemy still kept up a dropping fire. The regiments formed up near the neck, and marched off in formation, the Scottish Rifles forming the rear guard. I was obliged, owing to want of bearers, to leave a large number of wounded on the field.

In forming my decision as to retirement I was influenced by the following :—

1. The superiority of the Boer artillery, inasmuch as their guns were placed in such positions as to prevent our artillery fire being brought to bear on them from the lower slopes near camp, or indeed from any other place.

2. By my not knowing what steps were being taken to supply me in the morning with guns, other than the mountain battery which, in my opinion, could not have lived under the long-range fire of the Boer artillery, and their close-range rifle fire.

3. By the total absence of water and provisions.

4. By the difficulty of entrenching on the top of hill, to make trench in any way cover from artillery fire with the few spades at my disposal, the ground being so full of rocks.

5. Finally, I did not see how the hill could be held unless the Boer artillery was silenced, and this was impossible.

Lieutenant Winston Churchill arrived when the troops had been marched off.

I have the honour to be, Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

ALEC. THORNEYCROFT, *Lieut.-Colonel,*
Commanding Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry.

H

REPORT OF MAJOR-GENERAL TALBOT COKE, OFFICER
COMMANDING 10TH BRIGADE*Attack on Spion Kop, 23rd, 24th, 25th January, 1900*

Pontoon Bridge: 25th January, 1900.

In accordance with your orders, General Woodgate assumed command of the column for the night attack, and settled his rendezvous near the Royal Engineer bivouac, for 7 P.M., 23rd instant. I bivouacked on the hill upon which the Connaught Rangers' picquets are south of Three Tree Hill.

The first shots were fired at 3.40 A.M.

The valley between my position and Spion Kop, and also the top of that feature itself, was enveloped in mist until about 8 A.M., when it could be seen that our force held the schanzes on the summit. Shortly after it was seen to be exposed to a frontal fire from rifles, and to shell fire from its left front.

In accordance with orders communicated to me by you, to send a battalion to reinforce, a signal message was sent to the Imperial Light Infantry, which occupied a covering position towards Wright's Farm, to proceed at once to support, moving by the right flank of the kop. The 2nd Battalion Dorsetshire Regiment was ordered to the place vacated by the Imperial Light Horse.

The position of Spion Kop was now seen to be exposed to a cross fire of artillery, and by your instructions I sent the Middlesex Regiment in support.

About 11.10 A.M., in consequence of the regrettable

news about General Woodgate, at your order I proceeded to the kop myself. On arrival there, I found the track leading up very much congested, and, from information received, I formed the opinion that too many men were getting into the trenches and stone cover above, and becoming exposed to the artillery fire; I accordingly checked reinforcements. Soon after this, on my way up, an urgent message was received from Colonel Hill, who commanded at this time on the right, calling for reinforcements, as his line had actually fallen back before, and lost some prisoners to the Boers, who were pressing on in front. I accordingly sent up the rest of the Imperial Light Infantry available.

I now met Major Bayly, a Staff Officer, from the 4th Brigade, who informed me that an urgent message for help had been received from Colonel Crofton, who commanded on Spion Kop after General Woodgate was wounded. General Lyttelton had accordingly despatched the Scottish Rifles as an actual reinforcement, and a battalion of the King's Royal Rifles against the hill to the north-west of Spion Kop. It was on the further slope of this hill that one of the Vickers-Maxim guns was placed. (This battalion worked its way some distance up the hill, but its action did not materially affect the situation.)

I now again received an urgent appeal for support, this time for the centre and left. I sent the Scottish Rifles.

I now had only as a reserve Bethune's Mounted Infantry and the Dorsetshire Regiment. These I retained and they were not engaged at the actual front.

The shell fire was most galling, and was aimed not only at the summit, but at the crest of the spur leading up, along which reinforcements and parties bringing back wounded had to pass. The fire came—

1. From field guns firing shrapnel and common shell, situated, as I endeavoured to point out in a signal message to you, north-west of our position.

2. From a Vickers-Maxim, in about the same direction.

3. From a similar gun to the north-east.

All these were beyond the effective rifle fire, and our supporting artillery on and about Three Tree Hill and on the Dragoon's Maxim position apparently could not see them; consequently they poured, unchecked, an uninterrupted cross fire on to our position from about 8 A.M. till dark—ten hours.

Losses were very heavy, owing to the numbers necessarily assembled to hold back the Boer frontal attack, established under cover, and in which they showed gallantry in pushing forward to our lines. Colonel Crofton was now reported wounded, and the command of the troops in front devolved on Colonel Hill, Commanding 10th Brigade.

So the situation continued until 6 P.M., when I wrote a report and despatched it to you by Colonel Morris, A.A.G. (I request that this document, to save labour, may be attached). I first showed this to Colonel Hill, and he concurred, even taking exception to my reference to a retirement. I had no doubt that the infantry, which had so gallantly held its own all day, would be able to continue to do so when the shell fire abated at nightfall.

I accordingly went back to my reserves, having

personally handed over command at the summit to Colonel Hill.

About 9.30 P.M., in consequence of your orders, I left for your camp, leaving a Staff Officer (Captain Phillips) behind. The narrative must now be his.

About 11.30 P.M. this officer, who was sleeping, was awakened by the sound of men moving, and found a general retirement proceeding.

He allowed no one to pass after this, stopped the Scottish Rifles, and collected a large number of stragglers of the Dorset, Middlesex, and Imperial Light Infantry. Bethune's Mounted Infantry and the bulk of the Dorsets remained in position as posted in support to the front line. The other corps had gone down the hill.

He then published memorandum attached,¹ to all commanders, except Lieut.-Colonel Thorneycroft, who had gone on; but they did not act upon it, urging that they had had distinct orders from Lieut.-Colonel Thorneycroft, who, as far as I knew, was only assisting Colonel Crofton in a portion of the front line, to retire.

We now held the spur to within about 300 yards of the summit, but the summit itself was evacuated. Signal communication could not be established at the moment, as the lamp which the signalling officer counted upon ran out of oil, and some time was lost in obtaining another.

About 1.30 A.M. a person, not by his speech an Englishman, was brought in on suspicion by a picquet. He made a statement to the effect that a naval gun would shortly be brought up, and requested that it might not be fired on. This was the first intimation of any naval gun coming to Spion Kop.

¹ See page 154.

About 2.20 A.M. a naval officer reported that he had one 12-pr. gun below Spion Kop, near the donga on the west. He said he had orders to take this up to the summit. When asked whether he could do so before daylight, he said he could not. As it would be impossible to move the gun in any line after daybreak, on account of hostile fire, he was told to stand by in a place of safety. Signalling communication was now opened, and the attached message ¹ sent.

As Captain Phillips got no instructions, about 2.30 A.M. he ordered vehicles back to a place of safety. All regimental wagons had been sent across by the Deputy-Assistant Adjutant-General (B), 5th Division.

Shortly after 4 A.M., there still being no orders, and a mass of transport, small-arm ammunition carts, &c., at the donga, steps were taken to cover this passage, and, with the concurrence of the Officer Commanding Dorsetshire Regiment, and Officer Commanding Scottish Rifles, certain dispositions were made with the latter battalion and about half the former. The other half of the Dorsetshire Regiment were employed in carrying away a large number of boxes (about 80) of small-arm ammunition, brought back from the front and elsewhere.

The Imperial Light Infantry, Middlesex, and Thorneycroft's had apparently gone home. Bethune's were dismissed.

It was now light, and Boer 'sniping' commenced. Captain Phillips reported to me at the donga, about 4.45 A.M., when I was in possession of your order as to the pontoon crossing.

TALBOT COKE, *Major-General,*
Commanding Right Attack.

¹ See page 156.

K

CASUALTIES

Date	—	Officers			Men		
		Killed	Wounded	Missing	Killed	Wounded	Missing
January							
17th to 20th .	5th Division .	1	12	—	26	178	—
20th . . .	2nd " . . .	—	8	—	4	102	2
21st . . .	2nd " . . .	1	8	—	13	131	5
22nd . . .	2nd " . . .	—	1	—	1	19	1
23rd . . .	2nd " . . .	—	—	—	1	14	—
24th . . .	2nd " . . .	1	1	—	4	12	—
24th . . .	5th " . . .	21	22	—	139	388	279
24th . . .	4th Brigade .	6	11	6	32	120	2
25th . . .	2nd Division .	—	—	—	—	10	—
26th . . .	2nd " . . .	—	—	—	—	3	—
21st, 22nd, 23rd, 25th, 26th, 27th	5th " . . .	—	1	—	1	33	—
	Totals . . .	30	64	6	221	1,010	289
		100			1,520		
23rd . . .	General Barton's force is not in- cluded in above.						
	He lost . . .	1	1	—	4	5	11
20th . . .	Lost by General Lyttelton, not shown above .	—	1	—	2	13	1
		1	2	—	6	18	12
	Grand Totals .	103			1,556		
Losses on 24th (included above)	28	34	6	175	520	281
	Totals .	68			976		

There are said to have been 243 buried on Spion Kop, so no doubt many of those shown missing were killed.

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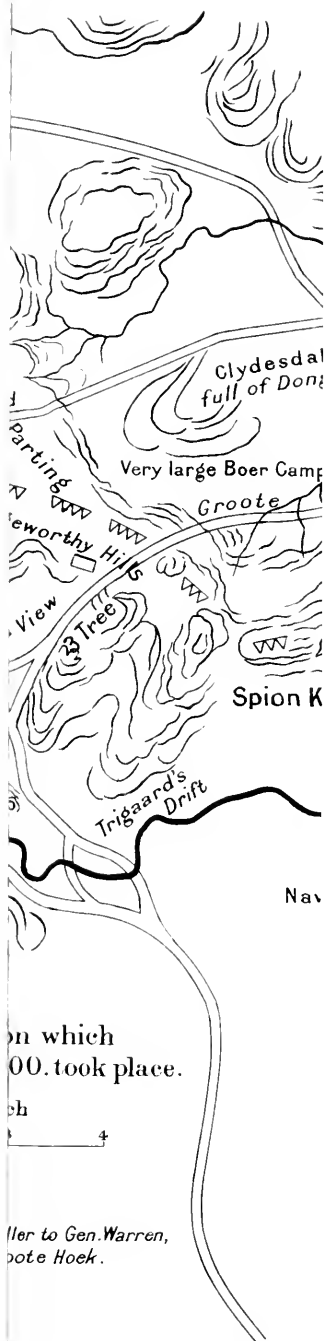
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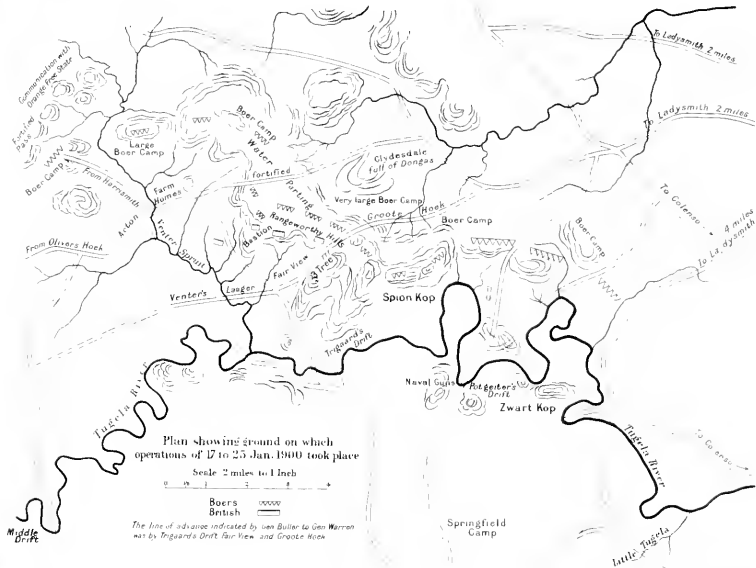
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